

Settler Colonial Infrastructure: Necropolitics and Ecology in the U.S. and Palestine

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Abstract

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This dissertation explores the representation of infrastructure in a settler colonial context in U.S and Palestinian Literature. It is particularly interested in representations of what I term “settler colonial infrastructure” such as National Parks, waste disposal sites and dams in American and Palestinian narratives. It argues that these infrastructures are implicated in the population management of BIPOC communities by virtue of their establishment within a settler colonial apparatus. It also demonstrates the way ecological protection can contribute to the ongoing processes of settler colonialism. It does this through an analysis of eight different narratives that are cross-genre and multimodal including novels, digital texts, a family memoir and a short story.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

“In the process of settler colonialism, land is remade into property and human relationships to land are restricted to the relationship of the owner to his property. Epistemological, ontological and cosmological relationships to land are interred, indeed made pre-modern and backward. Made savage.” Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang “Decolonization is not a Metaphor” (5)

“...settler colonialism will always define the issues with a solution that re-entrenches its own power.” Leanne Simpson *As We Have Always Done* (178)

Prior to the U.S and Israeli joint announcement of, “the deal of the century” in January 2020 that would legitimize Israelis annexation of the Jordan valley, an area designated in the Oslo accord as Area C (meaning Palestinian territory under Israeli security control), Israel’s defense minister Naftali Bennet earlier that month announced that Israel would open seven new nature reserves in the West Bank and expand twelve existing reserves all in Area C. Area C makes up 61% of the West Bank. Peace Now, an Israeli group that monitors settlement activities in the West Bank, stated that more than a third of those locations would be on private Palestinian land. In his announcement, Bennet, who was in the midst of a re-election cycle, declared that the move would “provide a big boost for the land of Israel” and that he “invites all citizens to tour and walk the land... and continue the Zionist enterprise.”¹ These nature reserves are not new projects in the West Bank. According to Peace Now, Israel has 96 nature reserves and 14 national parks in the West Bank already. Some of these “reserves” such as the Nahal Kane reserve have had settlement outposts (in the case of Nahal Kane, it is Alonei Shilo settlement outpost) constructed on them in order to allow Israeli settlers to reside in them. Another dimension to the nature reserve/national park issue in the West Bank is the fact that Israel’s Nature and Parks Authority has a symbiotic relationship with the Jewish National Fund (JNF). The JNF which frames itself as Israel’s leading

¹ <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/middle-east/israel-west-bank-nature-reserve-palestine-un-jordan-valley-netanyahu-a9286481.html?fbclid=IwAR1mHfGjXOKhLJhN4YC5tzLkkWUqzIhuuNuPebOUzLLidtUwOloTWbmrqto>

environmental organization has purchased 65 thousand dunums of land (around 16 thousand acres) in the West Bank since 1967 which were then used to build or expand settlements.² Furthermore, in her first trip overseas Vicki Christiansen, the newly appointed director of the U.S. Agricultural Forest Service, which manages U.S. National parks and reserves, met with both JNF and Israel Nature and Parks Authority, even going as far as to plant a JNF tree on the site of a burned down forest. This visit by a U.S. official to Israel's leading environmental institutions- institutions with a documented history of helping if not outright expanding the Israeli settler project- symbolizes one of many instances of the complicity of the U.S. in the Zionist project in Israel. A Zionist project that this dissertation takes writ large as a settler colonial project. Utilizing settler colonialism as a relevant interpretative framework for the study of Zionism is useful in building a Palestinian decolonial movement that is embedded within a broader global decolonization movement. As the historic response to settler colonialism has been the struggle for decolonization; in the absence of a settler colonial analysis, Palestinian strategies have tended to target or accommodate settler colonial outcomes rather than aiming to decolonize the structure itself. As Omar Salamanca et al observe, a settler colonial framework

not only offers conceptual and political possibilities for how we read Palestine today, but that it also dismantles deep-seeded analyses and assumptions sustaining claims of exceptionalism. It brings Israel into comparison with cases such as South Africa, Rhodesia and French-Algeria, and earlier settler colonial formations such as the United States, Canada or Australia, rather than the contemporary European democracies to which Israel seeks comparison. For Palestine, it means the reiteration

² <https://peacenow.org.il/en/settler-national-fund-keren-kayemeth-leisraels-acquisition-of-west-bank-land>

of the fact that Palestinians are an indigenous people, and an alignment of Palestine scholarship with indigenous and native studies. (4)

Transnational American Studies & Palestine: The Beginnings of this Project

This project for me started in Palestine. As I witnessed settlement after settlement being built and listened to or read about the excuses the Israeli government gave to seize Palestinian land, I started to wonder if the politics in Israel and Palestine are about more than just the human component. The altering of the landscape and the ecological impact of such altering begged the question of whether it was just as important to think about the environmental dimensions of the Israeli/Palestinian conflict. The violence that exacts a human toll in Palestine and its visibility makes it harder in fact to think through the “slow violence” -if I may borrow Rob Nixon’s term here- of the environmental degradation caused directly or indirectly by the Israeli settler colonial project in Palestine³. I use the word “conflict” in this dissertation loosely. The more accurate term I adopt is Israeli settler colonialism, which I will elaborate on later in this chapter. It is very easy to see the way ecological destruction goes hand in hand with settler colonialism in Palestine. There is precedence to this in other colonial contexts around the globe. It is clear for example how the razing of heritage Palestinian olive trees is a form of ecological degradation. It is also clear how destroying entire hillsides to add more settlements or the building of the separation wall has led to ecological destruction. Therefore, initially this dissertation intended to map out the issue of environmental degradation due to the Israeli/Palestinian conflict as represented in Palestinian literature. However, several concerns diverted the trajectory of this project, chief among them were the literary texts I became interested in. I was for example, interested in Anglophone Palestinian literature which has recently been primarily produced by Palestinians in the U.S.

³ Rob Nixon in his 2013 book *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor* conceptualizes the terms “slow violence” to describe the violence wrought by climate change, toxicity, deforestation, oil, etc, that is gradual and often invisible.

or by Palestinians for the U.S. Why the U.S. was a question both obvious and elusive to me. On one hand, the U.S.'s support to Israel and U.S. interests in the Middle East was deeply tied up with the continued subjugation of the Palestinian people. However, it also felt that there were other underlying issues that I could not quite underpin. The transnational element of this project started out from attempting to think through this question. Sometimes the connections between Palestine and the U.S. were direct and obvious such as in the writings of Twain and Melville. Mark Twain for example, in his travelogue *The Innocents Abroad* often compared and contrasted Palestine to the U.S. in the 19th century. He even went as far as to compare Palestinian peasants to the "Red Indian." Twain's comparisons live on today in Israel and have been appropriated by the Zionist project to assert that Palestine was empty and barren before the arrival of Zionists in Palestine in the early 20th century. I also realized that reading 19th century American literature felt somewhat familiar. It was as if I was reading a different yet recognizable version of the story of the Israeli settler colonial project in Palestine. The writings of the early founders of Israel and their descriptions of the Palestinian landscape read somewhat similar to 19th century U.S. frontier literature even though in some cases there was a 100-year gap between them. A further interesting development was the way traces of U.S. transcendentalism especially this idea of "walking" in the "wilderness" and communing with nature found its way to Palestine.

A culture or movement around "walking" within the hills of Palestine seems to be proliferating among Palestinians today. This growing movement seems to be born from the influence of Raja Shehadeh who published *Palestinian Walks* in 2007 and influenced the creation of a hiking group⁴. It also seems to be born out of a rising sense of nationalism amongst younger educated Palestinians with the rationale being that one can not make a

⁴ Shehadeh wrote a brief introduction to *Walking Palestine: Twenty-Five Journeys into the West Bank*, a guidebook by Stefan Szepesi (2012). This led to a joint foreigner/Palestinian group he started, called "Walking Palestine".

claim to a country if one does not know it. Today, there are as many as 70 grassroots Palestinian hiking clubs with names like “Wild Palestine,” “Palestinian Women Hikers Club” and “Walk and Get to Know Your Country.”⁵ Walking therefore has become the medium in which younger Palestinians are “re-knowing” their country with daily “masarat” (paths) being walked every day most famously amongst them is Masar Ibrahim Il Khalil (The Path of the Prophet Abraham)⁶. Walking in Palestine involves a degree of mobility and Israeli infrastructure in Palestine is designed to prevent mobility; its ultimate goal is to stop Palestinians from connecting with the land and with each other. Therefore, even though walking is not always accessible to Palestinians it has become increasingly employed as a strategy of resistance, as a method to reconnect with the land at a moment when Palestinian access to it is increasingly threatened. Anne Meneley, borrowing Jess Bier’s term “stasis” asserts that in this case walking is actually a Palestinian strategy for “stasis” (or staying put)(140).⁷ Non-profit organization have even caught onto this trend now and are organizing daily walks despite the fact that much of Palestine remains inaccessible if not outright dangerous to Palestinians⁸. Although Palestinians and Arabs in general have a cultural history with walking, the rise of a Palestinian movement around walking centered around nationalism is new in Palestine and other Arab countries. Some of the rhetoric used by Palestinian hikers and writers embarking on these walks echoed the rhetoric of U.S. writers in the 19th and 20th century that prompted later critiques around the wilderness tradition in the U.S. The rise of a walking movement in Palestine, is giving rise to a robust environmental

⁵ <https://www.npr.org/sections/parallels/2017/05/14/527044335/for-palestinian-hikers-in-west-bank-a-chance-to-enjoy-nature-and-escape-tensions>

⁶ The Masar Ibrahim al-Khalil is a 330 mapped walking trail by a Palestinian organization with the same name. It passes through five regions: Jenin, Nablus, Jericho, Bethlehem and Hebron. The Palestinian organization has support from the International Abraham Path Initiative which is attempting to create one long walking trail across the Middle East.

⁷ Anne Meneley in her 2019 article “Walk This Way: Fitbit and Other Kinds of Walking in Palestine” attends to the importance of movement in Palestine, positing that “walking” is increasingly employed as a strategy for “staying put” and reconnecting to the land at a moment when Palestinian access to their land is threatened.

⁸ <https://www.walkpalestine.com/en>

movement in Palestine that did not seem possible a decade ago. This movement problematically however also appears to be some version of the wilderness tradition in the U.S. Despite initially being interested in including this movement as illustrative of the transnationality of U.S. environmental epistememes because of the relative recentness of the Palestinian environmental movement, it seemed prudent to table this aspect of my project to a future time.

The Problem of Ecological Protection in a Settler Colonial Context

It was as I was protesting the building of the separation wall in the village of Al Walaja near Bethlehem and discovering that the Palestinian land that would end up behind the wall was to be turned into a nature reserve that gave rise to this project. I started to wonder how ecology gets implicated in settler colonialism in a myriad of ways. It was not only declaring the illegally seized land as a nature reserve that showed the complex interwovenness of settler colonialism, conservation and ecology, it was also that any attempt to reroute the wall through Israeli courts was met with resistance over the pretext that it would not allow an Israeli zoo to grow. To further complicate the issue is the fact that the Jewish National Fund (JNF) which declares itself as an environmental organization is ultimately implicated in all of this as it is not only the first founder of Parks in Israel but also their involvement with Israeli National Parks authority is a big indicator of how the military, the government and non-governmental environmental entities work together to establish a certain status quo in Palestine. Learning about the JNF through tours with the Israeli organization Zochrot and driving past huge swaths of land that have been transformed to parks that bear the logo of the JNF in the rare instances where I was given a permit to access Jerusalem, established for me this connection between environmental entities and settler colonialism. As a self-professed environmentalist this was jarring and went against what I considered to be the intention of the environmental movement worldwide. The fact that many environmental organizations around

the world had not only lauded but also contributed to the work of the JNF was outrageous. The way the JNF has been involved since before the foundation of the state of Israel to acquire land and establish nature parks and reserves was also a big turning point for this project. A main question for me has been why the JNF's stated goal of acquiring land for the pleasure and use of Israeli's has been largely ignored? Why in many countries around the world, its charitable status is still maintained despite years of research and reports that have revealed the connection between the JNF's brand of environmentalism and the dispossession of Palestinians. After all, in this instance the issue is not just that settler colonialism is destroying the Palestinian ecology, but that there are entities that use environmental degradation in the ongoing process of settler colonialism in Palestine. In this case, settler colonialism doubly profits from this ecological degradation. On one hand, the destruction of landscape and its ensuing ecological consequences serve as a way to ensure that Palestinians can not exist in certain geographies and spaces. On the other hand, by framing themselves as ecological stewards of the land fighting against desertification, land degradation, deforestation and as pioneers in water conservation in the Middle East, Israel ensures that it is perceived around the world as modern: a pioneer and an innovator in the fight against climate change. Yet one cannot deny the way that Israeli settler colonialism has utilized environmental infrastructures to implement a certain agenda on the ground. From its establishment of National Parks and Nature Reserves and the JNF's utilization of the planting of trees to cover over the ruins of Palestinian villages destroyed in 1948, to the way dams built for water management have been a front to control water in places like the Jordan Valley, to the way the West Bank has become a dump for both Israeli e-waste, household garbage, industrial waste and toxic waste, all these instances showcase not only a disregard for Palestinian lives but also the mode through which infrastructure is utilized in a settler colonial context to control and dispose of the Palestinian population. More importantly

however, the legitimization of the JNF seemed tied up with the narrative they have produced to justify their methods. As such, this project became interested in exploring these narratives and their influence in addition to narratives that attempt to resist the JNF's narratives.

Settler Colonialism as a Framework

Although this project was initially interested in the effects of settler colonialism on the ecology as represented in Palestinian literature ultimately this felt too simplistic. The effect of settler colonialism on the environment has been explored in global environmental scholarship extensively. As Kyle Whyte posits “settler colonialism is ecological domination.”⁹ Scholarship within the field of the environmental humanities has dealt with the effect of colonialism, settler colonialism and imperialism on ecology and the environment both in the U.S and globally. Examples of this range from Cronon on “discourses of purity,” Grove on “Green Imperialism,” Guha on “Third World Environmentalism and Forestry in India,” and Nixon on “Environmentalism of the Poor.” A central issue for me however was how to situate Palestine within these conversations. The effect of the Israeli/ Palestinian conflict on the ecology of historical Palestine was obvious. As I was reading Palestinian author Raja Shehadeh's work however, I became more interested in the complexities of how ecological protection can contribute to the ongoing processes of settler colonialism. This was during a time where more and more articles were written every day on the establishment of nature reserves and parks in Israel as a way to annex more Palestinian land. As a graduate student in the U.S. I was also reading at the same time the history of the National Parks in the U.S. with many U.S. authors also writing about the dispossession and displacement of Native American tribes from ancestral lands that were then declared National Parks. The Yosemite National Park case went even further. It was not just that a national park was declared after the Anishinaabe were displaced from their land, but then when some came back or continued to

⁹ Kyle Whyte: *Settler Colonialism, Ecology, and Environmental Injustice* (2018)

reside on land that was now considered National Park territory, the National Park Service, through a series of policies, made sure that life would be impossible within the park boundaries ensuring by the mid 1960s that members of the Anishinaabe tribe were no longer living there. The utilization of ecological protection in this sense was a turning point for this project as it became important to account not only for the effects of colonialism on ecology, but also the way ecology and ecological protection gets inherently implicated in the settler colonial project by virtue of its establishment by a settler colonial state. A question that motivated this project was, in what way is thinking through how this process played out in the U.S, and is playing out in Palestine today useful?

The transnational comparative nature of this project was birthed from attempting to think through both the similarities and differences between these two different geographical contexts. Initially, I imagined this dissertation as dealing with different kinds of infrastructures and their effect on ecology and Indigenous people in the settler colonial context. In the course of my reading however, I became interested in a specific sort of infrastructure; infrastructures that were developed to manage resource allocation. In the case of National Parks, it was to manage land and its resources, while in the case of dams it was the management of water. The decision to also include toxic waste was not as clear cut. Although the chapter on toxic waste includes some scholarship on the siting of toxic waste facilities, the literary texts I included do not specifically address this infrastructure. Instead they discuss the use of Indigenous lands as illegal toxic waste dumping sites. In this case I argue that even though we may not conventionally view the dumping of toxic and nuclear waste illegally and improperly as an infrastructure, it is through the settler colonial state's reneging on its treaties and its disregard for indigenous lives that it either does not establish the infrastructure to properly dispose of this toxic waste or when it does, it sites these infrastructures near vulnerable communities. In the case of toxic waste also, that these

infrastructures are not built or that they are built and located in certain places is a problem, however more importantly the problem lies in the need for these infrastructures in the first place. As both texts that are close read in the chapter on toxic waste demonstrate, it is the military industrial complex and wars fought in the Middle East in both the Israeli and U.S. context that propagates the use of nuclear and chemical waste that then Indigenous communities bear the brunt of.

Infrastructure Studies, Necropolitics and Ecology

The turn within the dissertation to thinking through the term infrastructure came out of engaging with the work of Eyal Weizman, Stephen Graham and Achille Mbembe. On one hand Israeli settler colonialism in Palestine would not be possible without an infrastructure that has transformed and redesigned the landscape. Eyal Weizman in *Hollow Land* focuses on infrastructures of segregation that we typically think of in a settler colonial context such as checkpoints, settlements, surveillance infrastructure, roads, and separation walls amongst many others. Achille Mbembe takes up Weizman's assertions around infrastructure in Israel and Palestine in "Necropolitics." Mbembe who specifically references the colonial occupation of Palestine as the paradigm for necropower, references Weizman's work around Israeli colonial infrastructure and Stephan Graham's infrastructural warfare as a basis for his thinking on the concatenations of multiple powers including necropolitics and biopolitics. Therefore, Mbembe's necropower is ultimately tied up with infrastructure as well. It is not just the role that infrastructure plays in the settler colonial context that makes thinking through it important, but also the insidiousness of infrastructure. Settlement requires establishing certain forms of infrastructures that once established are hard to imagine life without. It is hard for example to think of the U.S. without the vast infrastructure of a large city like New York, or without edifices such as the Hoover Dam. Similarly, in Palestine it is hard to imagine that all settlements would get dismantled now that they have been established

or the West Bank without a huge wall snaking around it. As Stephan Graham asserts, infrastructures are meant to be taken for granted by the privileged user and they can become a background that is often hidden, assumed and even naturalized, which is why taking them for granted can be so dangerous. Even though Graham talks here about infrastructures in urban cities one can apply this framework to infrastructures in a settler colonial context that privilege the settler. In the case of Israel, Israelis rarely see checkpoints, or the separation wall. They also rarely think that the road that they are on is a road that a Palestinian can or cannot be on. They do not see or perceive infrastructure this way because they are precisely in a privileged position whereby, they know that these infrastructures are designed for their benefit rather than their disadvantage. For the Palestinian on the other hand, these infrastructures are a sign of continued military occupation and settler colonialism. These infrastructures both symbolize the attempts to displace them and signify their material displacement.

Achille Mbembe's work on necropower was central to this dissertation initially as the project was primarily interested in questions around the management of native populations and population control and its connection to the natural and built environment. The goal was to think through Achille Mbembe's framing of necropolitics in the context of conversations within the environmental humanities on settler colonialism and the environment. As Mbembe argues, Foucault's concept of biopower is insufficient in addressing contemporary forms of domination and violence. In the context of late-modern colonial occupation for example, he argues that biopolitics and necropolitics are combined in the disciplinary structure of the state, "To exercise sovereignty is to exercise control over mortality and to define life as a deployment and manifestation of power" (12). Necropower according to Mbembe is when "sovereignty means the capacity to define who matters and who does not, who is disposable and who is not" (27).

Disposability is of particular importance to this project because of its relationship to population control. The framing of Palestinians as a “demographic threat” to the state of Israel¹⁰ has had an effect on the way Israeli settler colonial infrastructure is built and ecology and conservation have been implicated within that infrastructure. The dissertation aimed initially at exploring the relays between necropolitics as the exercise of control over the mortality of the colonized and environmental management as practiced by the occupying power as well as exploring how population management aligns with conservationist agenda within the settler colonial state. A problem I continuously grappled with is the way in which each field (settler colonialism, infrastructure studies, environmental humanities) has its own set of analytical questions, concerns and vocabulary making it hard to bring these conversations together. Necropolitics is rarely discussed within environmental scholarship. In Palestine, population control through population management is part and parcel of the settler colonial agenda and has direct ties to the ecology there. In the U.S. however, the conversation about population control within the environmental humanities is usually centred around capping our global population as a result of anthropogenic climate change rather singling out a community. Although environmental feminists for example have brought up the importance of capping population growth this still remains a highly controversial debate (and for good reason) because of the ways it historically echoes eugenics and reminds of the forced sterilization of Indigenous, black and brown and poor people around the world. Population control discussions within U.S environmentalism therefore rarely deal with it as a form of warfare or as a settler colonial tool especially when it comes to indigenous communities in the U.S. In the U.S. the settler colonial apparatus does not perceive the native as a “demographic threat” anymore and its objective currently is not necessarily to dispose of the native even if it perceives the native as invisible and disposable. In the case of the U.S.

¹⁰ This is mainly discussed in my reading of *The Book of Disappearance* in the coda.

settler colonialism's objective seems to mainly manage and control the native population since their growth does not seem to be a central concern. In Palestine, settler colonialism's objective is to control, manage and dispose of the population through a variety of means. This involves both violent and non-violent means including incentivizing and pressuring Palestinians to emigrate on their own. In the case of Palestine, demography and the fear of a Palestinian population overtaking an Israeli one, seems to hold sway with both Israeli politicians and the general public.

Ultimately, necropower did not feature as heavily or centrally within the project as initially planned. Initially, this dissertation asked how necropolitics figure into discussions within the environmental humanities. How might it be a useful framework within those discussions? What challenges arise from bringing these different analytical frameworks into conversation? However, necropower ended up featuring more organically as part of a larger conversation on environmental infrastructures and their implications within settler colonial projects instead of being a separate topic. Focusing on infrastructure complicates our notions around environment, a question that repeatedly came up within the texts analyzed in this dissertation asks, what is environment? And what is to be protected or deemed worthy of protection at the expense of other issues?

The Problem with Comparative Work:

A major concern that I wrestled with throughout the project was temporality and accounting for the difference in the historical moment between Palestine and the U.S. This project has not only been a transnational project but also transhistorical, finding similarity in both settler colonial contexts where fundamentally there should be a lot of difference. The project of expropriation is still visibly ongoing in Palestine through the continued expropriation of Palestinian land and through settler colonial violence. In Palestine, indigenous land rights are barely legible. The U.S. on the other hand has a 500-year history of

this to the point that the expropriation for many seems finished to the point where there are some conversations on decolonization and what that may look like. Maya Mikdashi in “What is Settler Colonialism?” reflects on the affordances and the limits of taking up the comparative framework in this instance arguing that:

Israel is not the United States. Comparative analysis is always as much about difference as it is about similarity. Centuries of ongoing struggle separate the experiences of the Indigenous peoples of Palestine and the Americas. Both peoples struggled, fought, and tried to maintain their ways of life... A reservation is a Bantustan is a refugee camp is Area A is an allotment is Native title is Gaza. But there are important differences. While settler colonialism has succeeded in both contexts, Palestine is still embroiled in what Wolfe has called the “the frontier stage.” The extent to which settler colonialism will succeed in historic Palestine is not yet clear, and Palestinians have not yet learned the terrifying grammar of the term negative demographics. To compare the two uncritically is a disservice to both peoples. (29-30)

This dissimilarity assumes the conventional thesis that the frontier stage in the U.S. extended from the 18th century and ended in the 19th century. Since Palestine is still embroiled in the “frontier stage,” a stage the U.S. has supposedly concluded¹¹ then the fact that Israel still employs 19th century American colonial tactics to amass Palestinian territory indicates how important thinking through a settler colonial comparative framework is. One may argue that in the 19th century, Americans did not know a better way for establishing the National Parks other than through violent conquest and that in the 20th and 21st century Israel should utilize a

¹¹ Though one may argue that the U.S.’s continued presence in Guam, Puerto Rico, South East Asia and the Middle East as well as the U.S.’s renewed interest in space exploration is an indication that the U.S. is still in the frontier stage.

more ethical form of environmentalism¹². As the continued establishment of nature reserves and parks in Israel indicates however, settler colonialism only cares about ethical environmentalism insofar as it directly advances its settler project. As long as it is profitable; in the sense that it contributes to the accumulation of land, it advances the states image as a steward or as modern and democratic, then environmentalisms goals, align with the state's nationalistic and colonial goals. Forms of environmentalism that do not align or are not profitable are either discarded or marginalized. Protecting land or trees that would encourage indigenous growth or cultural resurgence for example is antithesis to the settler colonial project. Preserving aquifers and rivers in their original state also does not align with the interest of a settler colony intent on providing its citizens, especially its farmers, with the means to sustain themselves. Refraining from producing waste through the manufacturing of weapons or disposing of waste properly in order to protect fragile ecologies and people also does not align with the interest of the settler colonial state. Moreover, an environmentalism that seeks to think through decolonization is taboo. There is some space for conversation about decolonizing National Parks in the U.S with individual National Parks working with Native American tribes on community-based conservation and acknowledging that they are on tribal land. In Israel however, since settler colonialism is ongoing and still being established, and since Palestinians are not considered citizens, community-based conservation is non-existent, furthermore, any talk about decolonization or acknowledgement

¹² Lorenzo Veracini in "Israel-Palestine Through a Settler-Colonial Studies" snarkily responds to arguments around Israeli settler colonialism by asserting: "One argument frequently offered in relation to Zionism is that it was a latecomer, that the twentieth century was not the nineteenth, and that the ethnic violence that had once been admissible in remote frontiers of settlement in various continents was no longer acceptable by the time it had its chance. The argument is offered to emphasize the hypocrisy of the political descendants of other settlers and other colonizers who blame Zionism for being violent while they themselves can afford to embrace liberal stances from the comfort of a largely pacified social body. Fair point, but focusing on the past can also obscure the present. I would like to suggest it may actually be the other way around: 'expulsions' are the present and the future; Zionism is not a latecomer, it is a precursor."

of Palestinian existence invoke accusations of traitorhood. Instead Palestinians are perceived as Arab transplants with no claim to the land.

The temporal dimension of this project is only one of the many challenges that arise from this comparative project. One issue that this project had to continuously engage with was avoiding simplistic comparisons between Palestinian and Native Americans. Even though the dissertation often refers to Palestinians as Indigenous, the usage of the term Indigenous here is used as a rhetorical act to connect Palestinians to other dispossessed communities which in the case of the U.S. is Native Americans¹³. This dissertation does not mean to at any point conflate Palestinians with Native Americans in the U.S. or imply that settler colonialism in the U.S. is the same in Palestine. On one hand, settler colonialism in the U.S. has different origins and has been ongoing for a much longer period of time. On the other hand, although Palestinians and Native Americans continue to be subjugated by discriminatory and vague sets of laws and rules, Palestinians are not grappling with a decline in their demography or cultural and linguistic loss. As Maya Mikdashi states “In Palestine, the present is still contested, and the history of Israel-Palestine is an intellectual and political battlefield. In the United States, the present is not controversial. In fact, it is “controversial” to demand attention and a modicum of justice for Native American lives and histories” (30). In the course of writing this dissertation, many have asked if this project is ultimately about Palestine. It is, but it is also about a settler colonial project that could not have existed without the U.S. The U.S.’s complicity in the Zionist project is not just built on mutual

¹³ Steven Salaita elaborates on this in *Inter/Nationalism* asserting that Palestine scholars and activists increasingly use the language of Indigeneity and geo-cultural relationships to describe the political, economic, and legal positions of Palestinians. The adoption of such language is a rhetorical act meant to situate—rightly, based on considerable evidence—Palestinian dispossession in a specific framework of colonial history rather than as an exceptional set of events brought forth by ahistorical circumstances. The language identifies a perceived sociohistorical familiarity with other dispossessed communities, in this case North American indigenes.

interests in the Middle East and political alliances, but also “on the affective registers of a shared settlement project” (Mikdashi 30).

Environmental Humanities and Settler Colonial Studies in Conversation

I situate this project in both the field of the Environmental Humanities and Settler Colonial Studies. It is important that we think and debate the implications of environmental degradation and environmental justice within both the Environmental Humanities and Settler Colonial Studies; especially if we are to think of settler colonialism, as Cavanagh and Veracini define it in their 2013 Settler Colonial Studies editor statement, as “a global and transnational phenomenon, and as much a thing of the past as a thing of the present.” Today, the conversation within Environmental Humanities is focused on new materialisms, posthumanism and understanding or even decolonizing the Anthropocene and there is very little engagement with Settler Colonial Studies or thinking through decolonization. The term Anthropocene has produced many debates around issues of how we might shift into thinking of ourselves as a species in a time when inequality across the globe still persists. It has also been criticized for its focus and privileging of the human, with scholars suggesting alternative terms such as “Capitalocene,”¹⁴ “Corporacene,” “Oliganthropocene” and Cthulucene¹⁶ as an alternative to relay the effect of capitalism, oligarchy, or corporations on our earth systems instead of humans as a species. These terms approach issues of imperialism, colonialism and racism in different ways but do not address the relays of necropolitics, settler colonialism or

¹⁴ Jason Moore’s 2016 book, “Anthropocene or Capitalocene? Nature, History, and the Crisis of Capitalism.”

¹⁵ In the case of the Capitalocene, Jason Moore’s key critiques of the Anthropocene and call for the Capitalocene as an alternative term is the periodization of the Anthropocene, which he says, “denies a longer history of capitalism that begins in the era of Columbus.” He also objects to the way in the Anthropocene discussion, humans as a species become a homogenous unit and “Inequality, commodification, imperialism, patriarchy and racism... all have been cleansed” (597). While Moore’s critique certainly brings to fore the way environmental justice gets side-lined in the Anthropocene discussion, his focus is on the Capitalocene as “a system that not only accumulates capital, but drives extinction” (597).

¹⁶ Donna Haraway’s coins the term “Cthulucene” to express a time of agency rather than the “Anthropocene,” which she says is about a time of destruction of places and refuge for people and critters. The “Cthulucene” to Haraway, unlike the Anthropocene or the Capitalocene, is not a diagnosis of a problem but a way forward through “intense collaboration”. She suggests this can be done through “multispecies stories” (55).

ecology. As we continue to grapple with anthropogenic climate change and as conversations on the Anthropocene, posthumanism and new materialisms, gain further traction within the Environmental Humanities, conversations around settler colonialism as an ongoing reality rather than simply that of the past have been side-lined. The ways in which oppression and ecology intertwine are more important than ever precisely because of the way settler colonialism seems invisible today or at least relegated to the past. Even conversations around environmental justice within the field of the Environmental Humanities, focus on socioeconomic inequities in general or global environmental inequities as a consequence of a colonialism that exists only in the past. It is important therefore to take up settler colonial studies as a framework that engages with the Environmental Humanities.

I suggest that Settler Colonial Studies as a growing and developing field can contribute to the unsettling of American and Euro-centrism within Environmental Humanities. On the other hand, I suggest that thinking through environmental issues can open up discussions within the field of Settler Colonial Studies about the way ecology and settler colonial practices converge and showcase the myriad of ways in which ecology is often implicated as biopolitics give way to necropolitics in the settler colonial state. Settler colonial studies in general has also been under-attentive to issues of the environment. Despite the interest in comparative settler-colonial formations, and a growing interest in bringing Israel/Palestine and the U.S. into conversation, there are very few works that also addresses the relays between colonial biopolitics/population management and conservation. Rachel Busbridge in a recent article titled, “Israel-Palestine and the Settler Colonial ‘Turn,’” posits that the recent boom in settler colonial studies, including the establishment of a dedicated journal, has seen settler colonialism “emerge as a key theoretical framework with which to engage contemporary colonial legacies, and has invited a variety of comparative projects seeking to explore the dynamics of settler domination and indigenous subjugation in various

contexts, most commonly Australia, Canada, the United States and New Zealand.” One of the interesting developments according to Busbridge is, the recent “groundswell in the application of the settler colonial paradigm to the conflict in Israel-Palestine...the recent ‘settler colonial turn’ (Collins, 2011) is characterized by a number of distinctive features, not least of which is the ways in which it brings Israel and its relationship to the Palestinians into direct comparative focus alongside New World white settler states” (2).

The Archive

The archive of this dissertation included a wide range of materials from the U.S. Israel and Palestine that interrogate and refract three sites that I chose as the focus of this project. On one hand, these three sites are focal points of confrontation not just in Palestine, but also in the U.S., especially because of the way they have historically involved land grabs and the oppression of certain communities. I also chose them because of the way they have involved the transformation of landscape and environment. The questions considered within this archive related to conversations within Settler Colonial Studies, Infrastructure Studies and the Environmental Humanities relevant to national parks, dams, and toxic waste. What does the examination of the three sites in the Palestinian/Israeli and U.S. contexts add to or change within the broader conversation between or within Settler Colonial Studies and Environmental Humanities? How can we put Environmental and Settler Colonial Studies into productive conversation through an analysis of the literature that addresses these sites? How does ecology figure into these narratives? In what way does the Environmental Humanities or Ecocriticism as a narrower field take up settler colonialism and address colonial infrastructures in relation to their specific impact on the environments with which they interact? What can we learn about population management and control by focusing on these three particular sites? Ultimately the question that the dissertation grappled with was how the

texts from the archive interrogate, reflect, resist and imagine these infrastructures as part of colonial necropolitics and population management?

This dissertation explored representation of “settler colonial infrastructure” in eight different texts that were cross-genre and multimodal including novels, digital texts, a family memoir and a short story. Chapter one, explored the narratives within three digital texts; The JNF, B’Tselem and Yosemite National park websites. Analyzing the narratives within these three texts was important to understand how these narratives displace the indigenous subject. These websites were chosen because of their public facing aspect. Even though the JNF and the US National Park Service have oversight over huge tracts of land each with its own visitor center, their engagement with the general public and especially their narration of their history has happened primarily through the information they make accessible through their websites. Similarly, B’Tselem has worked to disseminate its human rights work mainly through its website. Chapter two on the other hand looks at two Indigenous narratives; a fictional novel by Chikasaw writer Linda Hogan and a non-fiction book by Palestinian author Raja Shehadeh. Although these two texts differ in genre, they both take up the issue of hydropolitics in the settler colonial context in interesting ways; especially in their analyses of maps and borders and their relationship to water. They also offer an analysis of settler colonialisms failure to control/domesticate water and land precisely because they destabilize geographies in ways that exceed their control. Chapter three, also takes up two different texts from the U.S. and Palestine; this time on the issue of toxic waste. The two texts, one a novel by Ana Castillo and the other a short story by Palestinian writer Inas Halabi offer an analysis of the porousness of toxic waste and the consequence of toxic contamination for already vulnerable communities. Both these narratives grapple with how to sight the mutilation and death of human and non-human organisms in toxic environments. The coda which concludes this dissertation unlike the other chapters took up only one text as its subject matter, this time

a speculative novel written by Ibtisam Azem, a Palestinian citizen of Israel. Her text *The Book of Disappearance* offers insights into the conventional and overused trope of the Palestinian as a “demographic threat” to Israel and offers an intervention in the conventional notions of presence, resistance and existence of the native in a settler colonial context.

Chapter 1:

Narratives of Conservation; National Parks in Israel and the U.S.

"National parks are the best idea we ever had. Absolutely American, absolutely democratic, they reflect us at our best rather than our worst."- Wallace Stegner, 1983.

“Unparalleled in the Jewish philanthropic world, **Jewish National Fund-USA’s** strategic vision has been and always will be, to ensure a strong, secure, and prosperous future for the land and people of Israel. Everything we do -- every project, initiative, and campaign we take on – is integral to our vision of building and connecting to our land.” -Jewish National Fund, “Our Vision”

Salt of the Sea and the Oz Zegov case

In the film *Salt of This Sea*, written and directed by Palestinian filmmaker Annemarie Jacir, the connection between the Nakba (the 1948 dispossession and displacement of Palestinians from historical Palestine) and nature conservation appears suddenly and unexpectedly. In the movie, the protagonists Soraya (a Palestinian -American) and Emad smuggle themselves across the green line (1948 line) in order to explore the land that their grandfathers had been displaced from. Disguising themselves as Israeli settlers to achieve this, they find the destroyed Palestinian village of Dawayima and decide to move into a cave like house within the village. Soraya and Emad believing that no one will find them in this empty place, buy mattresses, blankets and a frame that reads “Home Sweet Home.” Despite their attempt to find a sense of belonging in this “house” in the destroyed Palestinian village, they quickly realize that they cannot actually stay there when they encounter an Israeli teacher leading his students on a tour of the area. This teacher mistaking them for hikers while at the same time suspicious of the fact that they had heard of the place in the first place tells them they cannot camp there since it is a national park. Soraya therefore realizes that the land she has attempted to create a home with Emad in was appropriated under the guise of public land to create an Israeli national park. The Israeli history teacher after asking Soraya if she is Jewish tells her that he is showing his students this land where they can climb the

“ancient ruins” (the ruins are the Palestinian village), learn about their roots and how they had turned this “biblical land into life again.” The national park in this sense becomes a vehicle of myth; a way for this history teacher to narrate Jewish reclamation of a ruined landscape. Despite the way the film rushes through this scene- as if it wants to comment on this connection, on this history, but has no time to explore it in favor of other pressing issues within the narrative- this description of the landscape is important. The description of the landscape as ruined and in need of repair or protection is part of a national myth that drives the establishment of national parks and nature preserves both in the U.S and Israel in ways that I will demonstrate in this chapter.

National parks are often seen as the “singular achievement”¹⁷ of the U.S, a “vision seen through the horrors of war”¹⁸ or as Wallace Stegner puts it “the best idea we ever had. Absolutely American, absolutely democratic.”¹⁹ National parks in the U.S are therefore perceived as a unique American experience, one to be proud of because of the way it disseminates outside of the U.S. spreading with it, as Stegner implies, American values such as “freedom” and “democracy.” In fact, the National Parks Service mission statement from their website says, “The National Park Service preserves unimpaired the natural and cultural resources and values of the National Park System for the enjoyment, education, and inspiration of this and future generations. The Park Service cooperates with partners to extend the benefits of natural and cultural resource conservation and outdoor recreation throughout this country and the world.”²⁰ Clearly they see their role and mandate as reaching beyond the boundaries of the United States. Historian Richard West Sellars claims that precisely because of the popularity of national parks around the world a creation myth about

¹⁷ Revisiting Leopold: Resource Stewardship in the National Parks A Report of the National Park System Advisory Board Science Committee, 2012.

¹⁸ Terry Tempest Williams, *The Hour of Land*, page 7.

¹⁹ Stegner W.1983. The best idea we ever had. An overview. *Wilderness*. 46 (160):4–13.

²⁰ <https://www.nps.gov/aboutus/index.htm>

the establishment of national parks in the U.S. had to be created. He refers to the story that the idea of national parks originated in 1870 during a discussion around a campfire at the Madison Junction in what is now known as Yellowstone National Park (7). Therefore, as Sellars explains it, whether the origin of the national park idea was inspired by altruism or by profit, it was important to create an origin story that framed the establishment of the parks as altruistic. “Surely the national park concept deserved a “virgin birth”- under a night sky in the pristine American West, on a riverbank, and around a flaming campfire, as if an evergreen cone had fallen near the first, then heated and expanded and dropped its seeds to spread around the planet” (8). Sellars metaphor of the national park as a cone with seeds that propagate around the planet is telling of how intertwined the idea of national parks in the U.S. is with ideas around democracy, freedom, and masculinity. Since these ideas are so intertwined, we therefore cannot separate the national park from the foundational violence that America was built on and in which the settler colonial apparatus still operates today. National parks in the U.S. rely heavily on a narrative of maintenance and preservation; more specifically the maintenance and preservation of the last remaining “pristine” and “virgin” wilderness. However, this narrative relies on the myth of U.S. as empty lands, one which as Anne McClintock in *Imperial Leather* succinctly puts it involves “both a gender and a racial dispossession.” For,

Within patriarchal narratives, to be virgin is to be empty of desire and void of sexual agency, passively awaiting the thrusting, male insemination of history, language and reason. Within colonial narratives, the eroticizing “virgin space also effects a territorial appropriation, for if the land is virgin, colonized people cannot claim aboriginal territorial rights. (30)

Despite the fact that national parks are often celebrated as a successful conservation model within and outside of the U.S., there has been an ample amount of literature critiquing both

the establishment of national parks and nature preserves in the U.S and outside of it as a result of the displacement of indigenous peoples as well as critiques of the practices of the National Park Service. This has been well documented in the U.S. context in books such as *Indian Country, Gods Country* by Phillip Burnham, *Conservation Refugees* by Mark Dowie and *Dispossessing the Wilderness: Indian removal and the Making of National Parks* by Mark David Spence. One of the places where this displacement is most clearly documented is Yosemite National Park where there is evidence of the complicity of the national park service and the state of California in the displacement of the Ahwahneechee People.

This conservation model, that designates large tracts of lands as public lands that must be protected from human development, is not solely a U.S. model however and has been exported abroad to places such as Australia, India, Kenya, Nigeria, etc. The establishment of national parks, nature preserves, wildlife refuges around the world in the 20th and 21st century has been met with varying degree of success and challenges. One common issue between these different places whether it is a colonial, settler colonial, or post-colonial context is the way in which indigenous communities often bear the brunt of their establishment which often results in suspicion towards conservation efforts in those communities. Ramanchandra Guha in his essay *Environmentalism: A Global History*, talks about the suspicion of local communities towards environmentalists in the context of India and South Africa where historically authorities responsible for national parks (SANParks in the case of South Africa and Ministry of Environment and Forests in India) are remnants of British colonialism. He argues that “the white settler identified with the land but not with the men and women who had dwelt there long before their arrival... in the game reserves Africans were barred from hunting, while in national parks they were excluded altogether, forcibly dispossessed of their land if it fell within the boundaries of a designated sanctuary” (46-47). Even though Guha reflects in this piece on the national park in a colonial context, his commentary on the

identification of the white settler with the land at the behest of the indigenous people who have dwelt there, applies to settler colonial contexts such as Israel and the United States.

To go back to *Salt of this Sea*, the connection between the Nakba and the establishment of the park is important to note in the movie. Although the movie reflects on an event that happened 71 years ago, by inserting a scene whereby an Israeli teacher disrupts the couples attempt to reconnect with their ancestral land, the film showcases that colonization and displacement are still ongoing. Soraya and Emad's displacement by the National Park is neither a new practice nor one that has ended. For example, in July 2017, Israeli settlers gathered for the ribbon cutting at Oz Vegaon nature reserve close to the Gush Etzion settlement in Hebron, West Bank. The nature reserve was established by an organization called Women in Green. At first glance, it may seem like another environmental group preserving land endangered by development and urban sprawl. However, The Oz Vegaon nature reserve was first established in July 2014 as a memorial for three Israeli teenagers killed by two Palestinian militants in the West Bank. The land that the nature reserve was established on was Palestinian land confiscated after the killing of the three Israeli settlers. Therefore, what at first seems as a touching gesture to memorialize three young men is a ruse for the continued confiscation of Palestinian land and a de facto punishment. *The Times of Israel* called this land "state land" while another Israeli news site "Breaking Israel News" called it "a small area in a neglected section of forest near where the boys were kidnapped." According to the article, Women in Green planted in the land "a pine forest, set up picnic tables with shade, a playground, camping site, and a visitors' centre." In this sense a conservation project became part of a longstanding strategy to dispossess Palestinians of their lands and displace them. This strategy of dispossession is not unique to the Israeli-Palestinian case. It has historical roots in the U.S. where some of the first national parks in the world were established. The move to front colonial seizure of land as environmental

efforts is not new and its history and the way it continues to be employed as a colonial tool is at the centre of what this chapter will explore. This practice has become common enough that the term “greenwashing” has been coined to describe this use of conservation or environmentalism to justify any number of less altruistic motives.

From Public Lands to Indigenous Commons:

As mentioned earlier, although there is an ample amount of scholarship critiquing both the establishment of the national park in the U.S. in addition to critiques of the narratives that contributed to their establishment, through a comparative lens, this chapter explores the way these narratives intersect with narratives from a different context; Israel. One of the only texts that deals with ecological narratives on landscape and national parks in Israel is Hannah Boast’s 2012 article “Planted Over the Past”. In this article, Boast declares that although “postcolonial ecocriticism” has come a long way since Rob Nixon identified his concern that literary environmentalism was developing as an offshoot of American studies, there is still a marginalisation of Israeli and Palestinian writing within postcolonial ecocriticism (46). This “blind spot” as Boast calls it, still exists today and therefore this my hope is that this chapter can contribute to bridging that gap. Taking up Boast’s usage of the term “national eco-imaginary” whereby “the national eco-imaginary becomes a domain of conflict when two nations claim a single area of land on the basis of differing collective memories and significances” this chapter is concerned with parsing out the connections between national eco-imaginaries in the U.S and Israel (48). This is especially significant in the context of their shared history with settler colonialism. At the core of my argument here is that despite the temporal and material difference in their establishment the Israeli National Park is another version of the American National Park. If we are to take up Patrick Wolfe’s theory of settler colonialism as “a structure, not an event” then how does a settler colonial apparatus contribute to the production of national eco-imaginary in the U.S. and Israel? For

what purpose does the idea of “untouched” wilderness get curated and how does it contribute to the necropower of the settler colonialism? And if we are to think of national parks as infrastructure in the settler colonial context involving both the designation of these spaces as “public lands,” and the dispossession of indigenous people, then in what way does labour function in this process? More importantly however, in such a context, what does decolonization look like? How do we critique national parks in a settler colonial state without being reduced to binary oppositions? Can framing national parks as “Indigenous commons” instead of “public lands” or “settler commons” intervene in conversations around the decolonization of these spaces?

To investigate some of these questions, this chapter is interested in analysing the national eco-imaginaries in narratives around conservation within three digital texts; the Yosemite National Park website, the Jewish National Fund USA Website and B’Tselem’s Israel National Parks website. It is interested the narrative form within these website as well as the silences within these narratives. I chose to analyse websites in this chapter because of their public facing properties. At their core, websites aim to communicate a message to some form of a “public.” As such they are typically comprised of certain components that are unique to that genre, including an “About” section, a “History” section and a mission statement. Every component within this genre is aimed at connecting with an audience. For organizations such as the Jewish National Fund, the National Park Service and B’Tselem, a lot of effort and money goes into the creation and maintenance of their websites. The website is the public face of their organization and exist as the main way they communicate with their audience.

As mentioned earlier, this chapter will also serve as a comparative study between the American narrative of maintaining the myth of American exceptionalism and nostalgia for

the frontier versus an Israeli narrative which is more focused on the reclamation and rehabilitation of a neglected land. Although Boast takes up national eco-imaginary in literature from Israel and Palestine, her article does not address the way Israeli national eco-imaginary is tied to the U.S. I argue therefore in this chapter that the narratives associated with conservation in the U.S and Israel contribute to a national mythology where wilderness is either in danger of disappearing and therefore is in need of maintenance and preservation or is in disrepair because of the “backward” practices of indigenous people and therefore in need of repair and preservation. These narratives rely on two contradictory myths, one that frames the land as empty and in need of protection from urban development in order to maintain its pristine state and another that frames it as a land in ruins from the “backwards” practices of its native inhabitants and in need of redevelopment and management. Alongside the primary focus on narrative as establishing infrastructure, this chapter will also demonstrate through an analysis of these three websites that conservation efforts in a settler colonial context are inherently complicit in the elimination of native peoples and thereby have also become an established part of the infrastructure of oppression that makes settler colonialism possible. It also seeks to demonstrate the way in which the settler colonial infrastructure of conservation areas such as national parks, wildlife refuge areas, and reclamation spaces in the U.S. and Israel are implicated in the necropower of the settler colonial state. Necropower in this case functions through what la paperson calls “terra nullus” whereby Indigenous Americans “In this ecological dystopia... are largely extinct through regrettable genocide, or survive spectrally through the settler’s Indian heart” (117). This chapter recognizes the importance of conservation and preservation especially in an era where we are increasingly seeing the effects of climate change and despite conservationist claim’s to innocence. At the same time, it argues that to make national parks or wildlife refuges possible in a settler colonial state, conservationists not only work within the

framework of a settler apparatus but also benefit from settler colonial attempts to eliminate the native and from colonial narratives about the land. In fact, in the case of the U.S. and Israel, conservation efforts have a history of being specifically and intentionally employed as a colonial strategy to immiserate Indigenous communities and seize the lands which they occupy. This chapter will argue that although national parks and their designation as public lands function differently in the U.S and Israel, their establishment is intertwined by virtue of the narratives they adopt as well as the function they serve as an infrastructure within a settler colonial context.

National Parks as Infrastructure:

This following section will demonstrate the logic of framing national parks as a settler colonial infrastructure. Although there is a body of literature on the infrastructure that make the national parks possible, there is very little literature that argues for the consideration of the national parks in and of themselves as infrastructure. Conversations in Infrastructure Studies often revolve around urban spaces with very little attention to spaces on the margin like the ones emphasized in this chapter. British scholar Stephan Graham in his book *Disrupted Cities*, focuses on what we conventionally think of when we hear the term infrastructure; systems of energy, water, sewage, transport, trade, finance and communication infrastructure. However, his book also points to the fact infrastructural edifices provide a “fundamental background to modern urban every day life” (2). National Parks, I argue, are seen as fundamental to modern urban life in the U.S. Teddy Roosevelt in a speech titled “Conservation as a National duty” in 1908, not only implied that conservation was important to maintain the moral and spiritual growth of the U.S. (which he believed was lagging behind) but also that the prosperity of Americans depended directly on the way natural resources were used. Roosevelt in his speech argued that these natural “resources are the final basis of national power and perpetuity” and because they were in the course of “rapid

exhaustion” it was their “duty” as a nation of “civilized men” to exercise foresight in order to conserve and “leave them undiminished” for the next generation. Roosevelt concluded his speech by stating that conservation is an issue that “the nation” had to grapple with if it wished to continue to exist. I attribute this interest in the conservation of natural resources in the 19th century not only to the rise of urban spaces and a realization that the natural resources that settlers found so ample when they first arrived on the shores of America were quickly dwindling, but also because of a newfound appreciation for “wilderness” and a nostalgia for the frontier era.

Prior to the 19th century, according to scholars such as William Cronon and Leo Marx, narratives around wilderness in the U.S. were largely negative. The term wilderness conjured up images of monsters, savages, witchery and evil. As Cronon states, “As late as the eighteenth century, the most common usage of the word “wilderness” in the English language referred to landscapes that generally carried adjectives far different from the ones they attract today. To be a wilderness then was to be “deserted,” “savage,” “desolate,” “barren”- in short, a “waste”” (70). However, at the same time literature that was glorifying wilderness was also emerging in the U.S. and by the end of the 19th century attitudes towards “wilderness” had changed. By 1862 Thoreau in *Walking* would declare “In wildness is the preservation of the world” (2042). Cronon in his essay “The Trouble with Wilderness” published in 1995 attributes this change to two broad cultural constructs: “the sublime and the frontier” (72). The frontier, according to him, is specifically an American construct (72). This construct was produced in order to form some sort of coherent U.S. national identity or character that distinguished the U.S. from others (particularly Europe). Cronon attributes the myth of the frontier to Fredrick Jackson Turner who asserted that European settlers “in moving to the wild unsettled lands of the frontier, shed the trappings of civilization, rediscovered their primitive racial energies, reinvented direct democratic institutions” which was the source of

the American democracy and nationalism (76). In this way, Cronon asserts, wilderness became the place of national renewal, the place to experience what it means to be American. The concept of wilderness, “had to become loaded with some of the deepest core values of the culture that created and idealized it: it had to become sacred”²¹ (Cronon 73). This concept of sacred relates both to the indigenous and the settler. For as la paperson puts it, even progressive concepts of lands such as the commons which function on the basis of collective stewardship require the negation of Indigenous sovereignty and even radical environmentalisms “uphold the settler fantasy of sacred ‘wilderness’ – another form of unpeopled land – that must be restored or preserved” (121). Leo Marx in his 2008 essay “The idea of nature in America,” specifically ties U.S. conceptions of “nature” to ideas around freedom, democracy and progress, stating that, “the encounter of white settlers with what they perceived as wilderness -unaltered nature- was *the* defining American experience” (8). This experience is what I believe Roosevelt wished to preserve despite his usage of economic terms in his 1908 speech as he sought to preserve the U.S.’s remaining wilderness by establishing more national parks. Though Roosevelt did not establish the first national park, he is the president who helped create the National Forest Service and helped pass the Antiquities Act that gave presidents the ability to protect natural and cultural landmarks.

The symbolism of the national parks remains a powerful one today. Terry Tempest Williams in her 2016 book *The Hour of Land* declares the national parks as “memory palaces where our personal histories reside” (20). Therefore, even though the national parks do not function as a system the way sewage or water or transportation function, they are a system that provide both a spiritual and a material service. National parks provide breathing spaces that allow urban life to flourish and exist, but they also sustain ecosystems that are integral to

²¹ Critiquing Turner’s proclamation that “The frontier has gone,” Cronon asserts that “those who have celebrated the frontier have almost always looked backward as they did so, mourning an older, simpler, truer world that is about to disappear, forever. That world and all of its attractions, Turner said, depended on free land—on wilderness” (76)

our continued existence on this planet. At the same time, they also have a cultural and symbolic significance as Terry Tempest William's description of them as "memory palaces" implies. Today the National Parks Service oversees sites that are not only connected to ecological preservation but cultural and historical preservation²². The importance and pervasiveness of these spaces has led to more than 300 million people a year visiting the national parks in the U.S. alone. Moreover, Graham's assertion that infrastructure creates new spatial conceptualisations that are a part of colonial incorporation is perceived in the way the national parks in the last part of the 19th and the early 20th century worked as an infrastructure to displace indigenous peoples in the U.S. We can also see this in the 21st century in the way Israel utilizes national parks as a spatial conceptualisation that displaces Palestinians in Jerusalem and the West Bank from their homes and lands. Even Graham's framework around invisibility and infrastructure despite its focus on the urban can be applied to the national parks. He asserts that "when the very rendering of infrastructural services as virtually ubiquitous and utterly ordinary takes place it means their use can become taken for granted and normalized as an essential, but largely invisible, support to modern urban life" (6). This is interesting when we think about the fact that a stated goal of the national parks is to protect the "wilderness" that the settlers in the U.S. found when they colonized the Americas. In 1962 for example, a committee lead by A. Starker Leopold, the eldest son of conservationist Aldo Leopold, was established to assess wildlife management in the national parks. The committee published a report in 1963 referred to as "The Leopold Report" and this report addressed issues ranging from elk populations to predator control. The recommendations within this report, such as its opposition to recreational hunting and the use of prescribed fire to help shape the park, has influenced the way the parks were managed by

²² This has included preserving and educating about National Historic Parks, Monuments and Districts. Therefore, it is important to acknowledge that there is a difference between the parks service's conservation goal and their cultural preservation goals, ones that are occasionally contradictory as they aim to draw people into visiting the park despite the fact that their conservation goals might be better served with fewer visitors.

the National Park Services for more than 50 years. This report also however explicitly recommended that the primary goal for the National Park Service should be the maintaining and recreating of the “biotic associations within each park...as nearly as possible in the condition that prevailed when the area was first visited by the white man.” The national parks, the report further goes on to assert, “should represent a vignette of primitive America” (Leopold Report). What is interesting here is the way the report explicitly, though somewhat unintentionally, ties the preservation of ecological spaces in the U.S. to the history of colonialism. The U.S. that Europeans encountered in the 16th century becomes the conservation goal of the National Parks Service. Furthermore, by assigning the parks the role of representing what is implied as the “original America,” the report assigns a cultural significance to the park; a significance that is essential the preservation of the park. This assignation also works to establish the parks in the American national imaginary as essential to the preservation of some form of fictional national identity. Through this cultural signification, the existence of the parks becomes largely normalized and ubiquitous.

It is important therefore as a result of this normalization of the park, to consider claims around their fictiveness. Although Cronon addresses the artificiality of the term “wilderness” more generally rather than focusing on national parks, his assertion that “wilderness” is a human construct with certain cultural implications, that these spaces are human creations that do not stand apart from humanity is important for thinking through how these fictions have helped make National Parks an essential and normalized infrastructure.²³ As Rebecca Solnit points out in *Storming the Gates of Paradise* “wilderness” is a “useful fiction,” one “constructed by John Muir and his heirs and deployed to keep places from being

²³ Cronon asserts that “Far from being the one place on earth that stands apart from humanity, it is quite profoundly a human creation... It is not a pristine sanctuary where the last remnant of an untouched, endangered, but still transcendent nature can at least a little while longer be encountered without the contaminating taint of civilization. Instead it is a product of that civilization, and could hardly be contaminated by the very stuff of which it is made.” (69)

destroyed by resource extraction and wholesale development” (246-47). It is more important than ever therefore to recognize the way this fiction has contributed to the establishment of the National Parks as the last remnant of untouched wilderness; a myth that is taken for granted and held as true. In this sense, National Parks are ubiquitous and what goes into making them possible remains invisible. Graham quoting Bruce Mau asserts that it is “the secret ambition of design” to be “invisible, to be taken up into a culture, absorbed into the background” and we can safely argue that the presence of the National Parks in the U.S. and their cultural significance has become precisely that.

Even though this kind infrastructure is often taken for granted, especially by those with privilege, it is very visible to vulnerable communities; not only because of the way these spaces have typically excluded them but also because of the role they play in immiserating them. Taking up Philip Dickinson’s argument about colonial infrastructure, these built environments attempt to give an impression of colonial permanence, against which Dickinson argues, stands “a native sector hemmed in in a way that marks something like the troublesome persistence of a superfluous, basically biological problem” (299). Even though Dickinson is speaking here about settlements, his argument about “a colonial ecology” can be applied to national parks. Dickinson’s defines “colonial ecology” as a built ecology that is a constructed to further the territorial interests of the colonizing power “and that affords different possibilities of spatial practice and lived experience for the bodies inhabiting the different strata of its racial and ethnic hierarchy” (297). He points to the different affective design of infrastructures in a colonial space. Certain infrastructures, he argues, such as roads, highways and transportation systems are perceived to affectively connect people, however, as part of colonial ecology networks of infrastructure are not about “the flow of resources” as much as they are about “blockage” and “closure.” As Dickinson writes, settlement building in fact could not have been possible without implementation of a strategy that involved

conventional infrastructures such as roads and ports and water but also the national parks. He writes:

Israeli settlement has been described as unprecedented in its ambition to “engineer and redesign (no less) the country’s geographic, ecological and agronomic mold” (Erat 2003, 60), and despite the mythos of Zionist self-reliance, this environmental redesign has been dependent upon centralized planning. Ariel Sharon’s Plan of 1950, for instance, turned within a decade from a document of principles with no statutory status to a massive infrastructural project embracing dozens of towns and hundreds of rural settlements, woodlands and national parks, ports and factories, roads and networks carrying electricity and water (64). What the Sharon Plan and many subsequent Master Plans in the years since make clear is how centralized and strategically planned Israeli territorial expansion was and continues to be, and how such planning sought to generate a division between Israelis and Palestinians via the reconstitution of the environment itself. (298)

To conclude then, it is important to think of national parks as part of the settler apparatus and not as repositories of nature in a pristine state and despite the fact that they appear ubiquitous in our lives and have a sense of permanence, as Graham asserts they are in fact “processes that need to be worked towards” (9). Meaning that they require constant effort to be maintained in order to function.

Critiquing the National Parks:

Terry Tempest Williams writes that “our national parks in all their particularity and peculiarity show us as much about ourselves as the landscapes they honour and protect. They can be seen as holograms of an America born of shadow and light; dimensional; full of contradictions and complexities.” (12) This view of national parks as a hologram shows the importance of critiquing them since there still remains very little public critique of them. In

the U.S. despite scholarly work on the history of the establishment of the national parks, the recognition that national parks are a settler colonial phenomena that arose at the end of the 19th century through the efforts of Teddy Roosevelt, John Muir and Gifford Pinchot, there remains a public silence on this history. I attribute this silence to the designation of national parks as public land which makes it hard to argue that they are also stolen land, since there is no one person who benefits from this theft. Many consider the national parks as “the crown Jewels” of the public land system. In a 2019 article in Outside magazine, Wes Siler declares that “America’s public lands are **owned** by the people and managed on **our** behalf by federal and state governments” and therefore the article tells us “How to take full advantage of [**our**] 640 million acres.” This is why when the Trump administration announced its shrinking of Bears Ears and Grand Stair Escalante National Monument in Utah, many considered this an act of theft with sportswear company Patagonia taking out a full-page ad in the New York Times to declare that “The President Stole Your land.” April Anson in her article “The President Stole Your Land” states that this ad in all its simplicity, showcases the idea of public lands that is shared by many mainstream environmentalists and states right proponents such as Cliven, Ammon and Ryan Bundy who led the Malheur National Wildlife refuge standoff over unpaid grazing fees and declared that the government was bent on stealing land. What this language obviously ignores is that since the U.S. was founded through the colonization and elimination of native people in the Americas, this “stolen” land has been stolen since the founding of Jamestown. What it also ignores is the fact that a U.S. president or a federal agency could grant or remove designations of these spaces according to their interests; implying therefore that these lands are actually owned by the federal government. Hence, the idea that these lands are “public” is a misrepresentation based in an ideal where the federal government actually represents the people. Instead they serve as a regime of socialized property. Furthermore, if we are to think of the dispossession that was inherently

part of the establishment of the national parks in the U.S. then that again brings up questions of whose public lands are they, and who does the term “public” actually include? The production of “public land” is an expropriation but also an appropriation of a certain “public” that supposedly can equally and equitably access these spaces. As this chapter demonstrates however, when we look closely at the history of these spaces, nothing could be farther from the truth. The way their designation involved settler colonial violence and conquest means that their very beginning involved a disenfranchisement of indigenous people. If they were indeed “public land” then wouldn’t they also be Indigenous land? Shouldn’t indigenous communities be able to also manage them and perform their ceremonies on their ancestral land without the oversight or permission of a federal agency? Anson surmises that when federal overreach occurs to native tribes such as the case of Standing Rock “the US legal system almost always favours the economics of the settler state, whether these be recreation or resource extraction” (51). She points out that the rhetoric of “stolen” land is an attempt by the ad to recruit an audience into what la paperson calls “a settler environmentalist project” (52). La paperson who is also known as K. Wayne Yang in “A Ghetto Land Pedagogy” argues for the way settler environmentalism “employs the logic of *terra sacer*²⁴, or sacred/accursed land, to describe ghettos as wastelands ripe for rescue by ecological settlers” (115). Despite the fact that la paperson is talking specifically about the North American ghettos, his analysis can be extended to the national parks as enclosed spaces where settler environmentalism employs the logic of *terra sacer* to describe the parks as in need of rescue by the ecological settlers. As la paperson asserts,

Land is a predominant concern in settler colonialism, and thus, people are arranged-raced, classed, gendered, sexualized, dis/abled, il/legalized-into triadic

²⁴ Terra sacer is a virulent variation of the settler colonial ideology of terra nullius, the colonial fiction of ‘empty land’ or ‘land not legally belonging to anyone.’

relations to land: the settler whose power lies in shaping the land into his wealth, the Indigenous inhabitant whose claim to land must be extinguished, and the chattel slave who must be kept landless (115)

In the U.S. the idea of what constitutes public land; “who’s land is it?” and “who has access to it?” has always been a contested matter. After all, can we designate land as public when it is has been acquired through conquest, violence and the subjugation of Indigenous peoples? Anson therefore suggests that since “public lands” operate through settler violence then it is more accurate to think of them through the lens of the “settler commons.” What Anson and la paperson do not address however, is the way in which the idea of the commons can be useful if we were to consider it beyond settler colonialism and the potential for the concept to play a useful role in conversations around decolonizing the national parks. Historian Allan Greer for example agrees with assertions that colonization happened through the establishment of commons rather than just settler claims to the land through the erection of fences or “enclosures” that excluded natives. However, he also argues that common property was not just a European concept brought to the America’s through colonialism. He argues that “the commons” was a central feature of both native and settler forms of land tenure in the early colonial period and that dispossession came about largely through the clash of an indigenous commons and a colonial commons²⁵. Versions of the commons, Greer claims, both the “inner commons” and the “outer commons,” were present in indigenous communities in North America. As research has shown, agriculture in the pre-Columbian New World existed and individual families or lineages did have plots of their own, subject to varying degrees of

²⁵ Greer claims that the view that enclosure rather than commons acted as the driving force in colonial dispossession is influenced by John Locke. In his essay titled “Of Property,” Locke explore the relationship between enclosure and commons by wondering how if the world and nature’s bounty were created for all of humanity, then how can anyone claim exclusive rights to a specific portion of the earth? His answer is that labor provides the ultimate basis for legitimate property rights.

community control²⁶. Greer therefore challenges long-held assumptions around property that frame Europeans as having imposed a regime of property rights on Indians who had no concept of property. He highlights instead the diversity of Indigenous relationships to the land and asserts that there was in fact an "indigenous commons," where there was a variety of arrangements by which terrain and resources belonged to specific human collectivities "America was a quilt of native commons, each governed by the land-use rules of a specific human society. The notion of a universal commons completely open to all—Locke's "America"—existed mainly in the imperial imagination." (372)

Despite recent work by the National Park Service to recognize the indigenous communities that lived on the lands that are now national park and forest area, there still remains a silence around the involvement of the National Park Service in the elimination of the presence of indigenous people from those parks. In the case of Yosemite National Park for example, recent revisions of the website recognize the presence of Indigenous people in Yosemite as well as the atrocities which they faced. However, this history is brief and the silences within the narrative showcase that which the National Park Service refuses to recognize; that their policies ensured that the remainder of native people in the park were displaced and dispossessed of their ancestral lands. There is also little acknowledgement that the National Park Service exploited Native American labour as a means to both operate the park and eliminate native presence in the park. This silence may be an attempt to avoid undermining the environmental movement and the conservation work the National Park Services is attempting to do, however public recognition of this history is important for

²⁶ Greer cites the great cities of Mesoamerica as an example of this. He says there "lay villages and hamlets with intensively cultivated fields, some of the latter belonging to particular households, others owned by temples, local chiefs, or urban nobles and worked by the community. Plots were carefully measured, marked, and recorded; tenure displayed some characteristics associated with "enclosed" areas of England and some characteristics of what Locke would call legal, particular commons. Thus, this can be viewed as a zone of enclosure and "inner commons." Beyond the villages and cornfields lay a different kind of commons: the forest or mountains or desert terrain where local people went for firewood, wild herbs and berries, game, and other resources. Scholars have found little specific information on this Mesoamerican "outer commons" in the surviving sources, but in general terms they have no doubts as to its existence."

decolonizing these spaces. Moreover, shifting the narrative from framing the national parks as a 19th century response to U.S. industrialization and war to framing them as “indigenous commons” instead can help centre indigenous ways of life and knowledges and start a conversation on how to shift away from a “settler commons” to an “indigenous commons” instead. The U.S. continues to grapple with its colonial and imperial history and its treatment of its indigenous community. Alyosha Goldstein in his essay “Where the Nation Takes Place” argues that the reason the U.S. voted against the “Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples” in 2007 at the United Nations General Assembly was because of its refusal to justly deal with its own indigenous people. Goldstein suggests that indigenous rights claims pose

“a substantial threat... to the fictive coherence of settler nation-states, which have historically sought to render the persistence of “nations within” as a domestic concern without international implication. Indeed, settler colonialism in the United States has insinuated itself over time in such a way as to obscure the persistence of colonialism as anything other than a historical trace, as well as to ostensibly naturalize settlers by habitation and descent” (833-834)

Since conservation areas are public lands, it is very difficult to critique them productively. However, a more productive debate about national parks could be had if the conversations shift to thinking of them as “settler commons” that need to be decolonized. To further complicate critiques of these kinds of public lands is that there are both Indigenous conservation efforts as well as ally-ships between the environmental movement and Indigenous peoples to protect public lands. Many cite the work indigenous communities do to defend the designation of these spaces as national parks as a legitimization of national parks. After all, why would Native Americans defend an infrastructure that dispossessed them of their ancestral land? However, these kinds of arguments make it more pertinent to recognize

the way in which conservation can be a strategy of extending a practice of domination precisely because of the way that these practices are complicated and harder to delegitimize. Furthermore, framing the national parks as “settler commons” versus “Indigenous commons,” which we might achieve through decolonization can help in understanding Indigenous resistance to the shrinking of places such as Bears Ears and Grand Stair Escalante National Monument.

The Yosemite National Park Website

In November 2018, the National Park Service (NPS) changed its website entry about Yosemite National Park. Prior to that, the website had one entry about the “Yosemite Indians” that was listed under the “People of the park.” Within this website entry there were two links, one was titled “Life, History, and Language” and the other was titled “Indian Village of Ahwahnee.” Both these links took us to website entries that were very brief. In these entries the NPS narrated the history of the Ahwahneechee people (Also called the Miwok people) and their displacement from the park. The briefness of this narrative, the many silences within it as well as its usage of the passive voice, showed a stark contrast between what actually happened and what the NPS says happened. The NPS narrative glossed over a lot of details and claimed that after the 1900s the number of Native Americans living in Yosemite began to shrink. They did not make clear why or how this happened other than to blame the California Gold Rush in 1849 and the ruthless miners who contributed to the killing and starvation of the Ahwahneechee people. The NPS also mentioned the Mariposa Battalion, a state sponsored militia who attempted to remove the Ahwahneechee from the Yosemite valley to the Fresno river reservation. The narrative however claimed that these attempts were unsuccessful in removing American Indians from Yosemite. The narrative then shifted from explicitly mentioning the factors behind the displacement of Native Americans from the park to vagueness. The older Indian Village it described “was

disbanded” in the 30s and “a group of cabins was established as a new Indian Village (with the National Park Service as landlord).” Who disbanded the older village and why, is not mentioned anywhere on the website. Then finally they concluded by saying “With housing more difficult to obtain, fewer Indian people came to Yosemite for employment. The National Park Service gradually dismantled the new village, and the last homes there were razed in 1969.” The silence within this narrative hides the process in which the Ahwahneechee had been expelled from Yosemite. Mark Dowie in *Conservation Refugees*, describes this process in much more detail and how the Ahwahneechee became cheap labor for the NPS since they were only allowed to reside there if they worked for the park. Patrick Wolfe asserts that this practice is not an isolated case, but a part of the infrastructure of settler colonialism.

Considering the emphasis that settlers place on individual diligence, the extent to which they rely on the efforts of others is striking. When colonists first arrive, they generally try to persuade the Natives to work for them. This option is typically abandoned before very long... In principle, it is not good policy to incur reliance on a population that one is simultaneously seeking to eliminate, nor to promote the survival of the bearers of sovereignties that exceed the settler import. In practice, the possibilities for escape are favorable for enslaved Natives whose coercion is taking place in the midst of a surrounding network of support systems. (Wolfe 1-2)

The NPS gradually diminished the American Indian population in the park by evicting the unemployed and prohibiting new tribal members from taking the place of those who died or left. To make matters worse, when the head of household would die, the NPS would vacate the house and expel the residents from the park. Eventually Dowie says “In 1969 the last of the settled Miwoks were ushered from the park and their village was set on fire as a firefighting drill” (10). This model for the establishment of national parks spread to other

places beyond the U.S. borders, first in Australia, then Canada, then New Zealand and it was adopted by Europeans during their colonization of Africa. All of these parks according to Dowie bore similarities to Yosemite in the way they were established; natives were “cleared out so colonials could enjoy the aesthetics of wild nature, and in the case of Africa, selectively hunt the game for trophies” (12). As la paperson notes “Indigenous vanishing is essential for the twenty-first century ecological settler to become the new adoptive ‘native’, and thus rightful re-inhabitant of Native land” (117). Presumably this is not what the National Park Service means in their mission statement by a “benefit...throughout the world,” nonetheless, for the settler state their enshrinement as rightful inhabitant and protector is most certainly an essential paradigm for the establishment of their infrastructure, and national parks are a perfect tool for making that claim.

As mentioned earlier, in November 2018 the Yosemite website was updated. One of the main things this update revised was the entry about “Yosemite Indians.” When you click on it today it takes you to the old website entry but on the right is a list of new website entries the park services created. These include: “Their Lifeways,” “Tools and Trades,” “Plant Use,” but most importantly a web entry titled “Destruction and Disruption.” This new entry starts with a series of questions such as: “Imagine strangers invading your neighbourhood, burning your house to the ground, and ransacking your local grocery store, and taking over your town. Could you make a living in a foreign culture that invaded your world? Could you hold your family together? Could you survive?” Then it proceeds to give a different account of the Mariposa Battalion than what it had previously recounted. It states that when the Mariposa Battalion entered Yosemite Valley, they “systematically burned villages and food supplies and forced men, women, and children away from their homes. When the Indians returned, Yosemite was no longer theirs. New settlers had claimed it as their own.” This new website entry also tells a story of the survival of To-tu-ya the last survivor of the Mariposa Battalion

who returned to Yosemite in the late 1920s. Although this new revision of the history of Yosemite National Park may seem promising at first it is both confusing and riddled with inaccuracies. For one, the updated website still had both the old account of the Mariposa Battalion and the new revised account albeit on different pages. The new entry “Destruction and Disruption” also makes no mention of the disruption that the NPS had perpetrated on the Indigenous people still residing within the park. So even though the NPS has adjusted the narrative, they still maintain their silence in regard to their own role in the displacement of native peoples. The fact that the NPS forced the Ahwahneechee to work for them in order to reside on their ancestral land is also largely ignored and is one example of the way necropower functions within the national parks of the settler colony. Through the designation of parks as public lands and by making labor the condition for presiding within the park boundaries, the Miwok are reduced to being tenants, with their life and livelihood reduced to the labor they can produce. The update of the Yosemite National Park website is therefore a strange half measure in terms of acknowledging the wrongs of the past. Most likely part of the contradictions within it can be attributed to bureaucracy and overworked clerks.

However, as the analysis of the website showcases, in no version (past or present) is there an acknowledgment of the role NPS played in the displacement of the Ahwahneechee. The revision of the website has certainly taken into consideration critiques of the park’s erasure of native presence and voices and maybe in a drive to make the park more inclusive to the Indigenous communities that were displaced, and in the spirit of community based conservation it has worked to acknowledge more fully native presence and history within the park. However, while it now recognizes more fully the existence of the Ahwahneechee, it still also manages to shift blame and maintain the silence in regard to its own role, relegating what happened to an unfortunate byproduct of the gold rush rather than an intentional and often repeated function of National Park establishment.

The Exportation of the U.S. National Park to Israel:

U.S. and Israeli attempts to preserve and maintain the wilderness have similar rationale.

Ramachandra Guha in his book, *Environmentalism: A Global History* asserts that “wilderness” filled a void in the U.S. that Europeans didn’t have. “Unlike Europe, where the farmer and the shepherd carried in themselves the continuity of an ancient culture, there was no authentic heritage here of peasant life and traditions... Into this void stepped the wilderness, which became so to speak, America’s past- a past to be mighty proud of ... this new nation could boast of a series of natural wonders vastly superior to the man-made artefacts, the churches, forts and paintings of Europe” (53). The National Park Service then came to be through the Organic Act signed by Woodrow Wilson in 1916 in order to “conserve the scenery and the natural and historic objects and the wildlife... and leave them unimpaired for the enjoyment of future generations.” Similarly, in Israel, the establishment of the Jewish National Fund, Women in Green and the Nature and Parks Authority as well as other conservation organizations in the 20th century was to safeguard the land of “Israel” for future generations as stated by the mission statement of these organization. Similar to the U.S. national parks, these conservation groups also frame their work in establishing national parks in Israel as part of achieving a conservation goal for the enjoyment of future generation. Their cultural significance however differs in two ways. On one hand, these parks are established through the planting of new forests instead of conserving or preserving what is already present. This mainly works to emphasize the narrative of Palestine being a land in disrepair after the Jewish exodus and under “Arab” stewardship that must be rehabilitated to its former state (Even though what this “former state” is, is not clear). What gets planted is also very telling in regards to the cultural signification of the Parks. By planting forests of pine for example instead of Indigenous trees, Israeli conservation groups, especially the JNF seem to have reproduced environments that were more familiar to the Ashkenazi Jews who

immigrated from Europe and the U.S. and found Palestine's arid landscape to be hostile and unfamiliar.

There is another crucial difference in the way the establishment of Israeli national parks is justified in the sense that the Israeli narrative frames Israeli presence as indigenous and continuous. The U.S. national parks on the other-hand have functioned with the goal of preserving land as they were found pre-colonization, therefore implicitly acknowledging, colonization and Indigenous presence. Israeli conservation groups frame it as preserving and returning land to how it was prior to the Jewish exodus, therefore claiming Indigeneity while at the same time erasing Palestinian presence and history in the land. This claim of indigeneity has been fundamental to Israel's founding since its beginning. This Israeli narrative creates a paradox that I will further elaborate on when I discuss the conflicting narratives within the JNF-USA website.

The establishment of national parks in Israel is supported by the U.S. and its imperial power in the Middle East. In a *Haaretz* report about the settlement industry in the West Bank, they reported 30 million U.S. dollars that are tax deductible are sent to Israeli settlements in the West Bank every year, not to mention the military support the U.S. government gives to the Israeli government; military support that helps maintain the status quo in the occupied territories and protect settlers and a state that confiscates lands and turns them into national parks. Furthermore in 1926, the Jewish National Fund was incorporated in the United States, in order to develop a charity system within the U.S that supports the work of the JNF in Israel. Later on, JNF- USA separated itself from its Israeli branch called the KKL-JNF. For years the U.S. branch however continued to financially support KKL-JNF until in 2017 it reduced its contributions significantly over what seems to be a disagreement of fund allocation and the desire of the USA branch to have more of a say in decision making. To be clear both branches boast the same history and vision on their website and support work on

ecology and afforestation; water; community development; research and development; tourism and recreation; and education in Israel. The JNF-USA on its website includes as one of its visions that they “see thousands of new American immigrants - modern pioneers - contributing to the economic vitality and the fabric of modern Israeli society.” Therefore, in a sense, the JNF still today considers Americans “pioneers” who will contribute to the development of the land of Israel. Although this chapter is a comparative study between a governmental agency (The National Park Service) and a nongovernmental agency (the Jewish National Fund), I find that putting them in conversation with each other is useful when considering the narratives, they adopt. Despite the fact that the Jewish National Fund in all its entities is not the governmental equivalent of the National Park Services in the U.S. (the actual equivalent would be the Israel Nature and Park authority), The Jewish National Fund functions in very similar ways and in reality probably holds more power in Israel than the U.S. National Park Service or the Israel Nature and Park authority. They also have a partnership with the Israeli Nature and Parks Authority which does do what we would typically think of as conservation and has a history of establishing parks alongside the NPA. This can be attributed to the fact that the JNF is the second largest land holder in Israel after the Israel Land Administration (which is an Israeli government organization) and was established prior to the establishment of the state of Israel by the many of the same people who would later be the founders of the state of Israel in order to buy out Palestinian land in what was then Ottoman controlled Palestine.²⁷ The Jewish National Fund was specifically founded in 1901 during the 5th Zionist congress in Basel, Switzerland by Theodore Herzl as a fund to be “used to build the foundations of a Jewish state” (History, JNF-USA website) and yet today considers itself “a global environmental leader.” Uri Marinov, who served as

²⁷ Although the JNF maybe be thought of as similar to the Nature Conservancy which also has significant land holding in the United States, the JNF differs in the way that it is quasi-governmental and has significant state power. Because the JNF holds 10 of 22 seats in the Israeli Land Administration which administers 93% of land in Israel, virtually no decision can be made regarding state land without their approval.

director of the Environmental Protection Service in the Ministry of the Interior and later as director general of the Ministry of the Environment, proudly declared that “Before it did anything else, the first thing that the Zionist movement did was to set up an official conservation agency—the Jewish National Fund—and start planting trees.” To Marinov, through the JNF, the Zionist movement made “land restoration” the centrepiece of its operations²⁸. For Jewish communities around the world, donating money to the JNF became an integral part of Jewish life. The JNF mass-produced blue collection boxes and distributed them as early as 1904. These blue boxes became a symbol of Zionism. Many Jews believed that money collected was not a donation, but an investment that contributed to the well-being of Jews. Trees as a result were planted in Palestine, and then in Israel, in honour of births, bar and bat mitzvahs, marriages and deaths.

It is important then to track how a foundation established to create a Jewish homeland in historical Palestine became the leading environmental organization in Israel. In the first decade of its existence the JNF mainly worked on two things: buying as much land as it could and playing a central role in establishing Tel- Aviv the first Jewish city in Palestine. I should caution here that although the JNF claims that it was buying lands, it does not say from whom or how, though it does seem to mention that the British mandate in Palestine at some point attempted to prevent Jewish settlement in Palestine and that the JNF still purchased and helped settle these lands. Lands were, and still are, obtained by the JNF from Palestinian inhabitants through exploitative land sales, forced removal or State imposition of other apartheid policies. When it was founded the JNF was working mainly on establishing afforestation programs on lands it had acquired and on establishing farming communities and experimenting with agricultural methods. This duality in function can only be explained by the fact that the JNF, true to its mission of building the national foundations for a Jewish state

²⁸ Alon Tal in *Pollution in a Promised Land*

recognized the importance of Kibbutzims to achieve statehood and that in order to establish a Jewish homeland, Jewish settlers needed to learn how to grow food in an arid region. The JNF's work during that period to establish afforestation programs seems secondary and born out of symbolism rather than necessity. For example, their first afforestation program was the planting of an olive grove in memory of Theodore Herzl on land purchased in Hulda. This was a recognition by the JNF of the symbolic weight Theodore Herzl had as a "visionary of the state" and a desire to commemorate that memory. Therefore prior to 1948, The JNF appears to have been more of a landholder and landlord than an environmental agency. In the 1920s, as a result of WWI the JNF decided it would lease lands it had acquired through donations to Jewish settlers by inheritable leasehold so that by 1927 they had purchase 50 thousand acres of land and established 50 communities on these lands. Following the establishment of these communities, the JNF famously drained the Hula valley for agricultural purposes. The effect of draining Hula was devastating and today, ironically enough, the JNF is working on restoring the swamps that they initially drained. By 1948 the Jewish population in mandate Palestine was 650 thousand who lived in 305 towns. Two hundred and thirty-three of these towns were on JNF land. The importance of the JNF in the establishment of Israel is also witnessed by the fact that when the British forces withdrew from Palestine, the declaration of independence for the new state of Israel was voted on at JNF headquarters in Tel Aviv. According to the JNF-USA history page, though their principle task before independence was to purchase land for settlement, after the war the JNF concerned itself with settling new areas, absorbing immigrants and reclamation of land for agricultural purposes. Forests they claim were planted during this time too. After the 1950s, The JNF accelerated their afforestation programs, planting a huge number of trees and creating forests. The acceleration of the afforestation program is attributed to Ben Gurion. In the 60s, Ben-Gurion would deliver an impassioned speech in Israel's Knesset extolling nature

and its preservation. He also famously pressured Yosef Weitz, director of the Land and Afforestation Department for the JNF, after 1948 to plant trees and reportedly told him that he wanted to plant one billion trees over the next decade—one hundred million a year. Alon Tal in his book *Pollution in a Promised Land*, attributes this desire to the nostalgia of many European Jews for the lush landscapes of Europe. One way these “pioneers” could overcome their alienation and make the landscape seem more hospitable and familiar was by planting trees (28).

The JNF claims to have done this for “ecological reasons” and “the enjoyment of all Israelis,” however if we are to look more closely, many of the parks they established have been established on the sites of destroyed Palestinian villages as a form of erasure of past violence, while others, as will be discussed, are being established still today as a way to erase the present. One such park they boast about is the American Independence Park, which even the JNF website admits is on the remains of the Palestinian village Deir al-Hawa, and the Palestinian town of Beit Shemesh which were destroyed in 1948. Although this village was destroyed prior to designating it a park, the establishment of the park showcases the JNF’s attempt to paper over the violent history of the establishment of the state of Israel. Today, in the West Bank and South of the Negev, the JNF finances the destruction of Palestinian villages such as Al-Araqib in order to plant trees^{29,30}. The JNF today holds 13% of Israeli land while the ILA holds 80% though the JNF as mentioned holds ten of the twenty two seats on the ILA Council as well. In addition, since 2015, the Israeli government has debated rerouting Israel’s Nature and Parks Authority whereby the JNF finances the Nature and Parks Authority and in exchange the government would dedicate financial reserves to the JNF in its

²⁹ <https://peacenow.org.il/en/settler-national-fund-keren-kayemeth-leisraels-acquisition-of-west-bank-land>

³⁰ https://www.adalah.org/uploads/oldfiles/Public/files/English/Publications/Position_Papers/Forced-Displacement-Position-Paper-05-13.pdf

legislative budget. Today the JNF boasts that they have created more than 2000 parks in Israel and planted more than 250 million trees. An example of such a park is the Canada National Park which was funded and created by the JNF and extends from No man's land into the West Bank and sits on the lands of two Palestinian Villages; Imwas and Yalo.

The JNF website:

The Jewish National Fund (both the USA and the KKL version) website has no mention of Palestinians in their history page as if any mention of Palestinians would mean an acknowledgment of their existence and the existence of a Palestine before the state of Israel. Occasionally sections of the website mention "British mandated Palestine" and some sections dedicated to talking about certain parks that have been established mention Palestinian villages, but it is in very vague terms and without any mention of Palestinians as if these villages were unoccupied. Like the Yosemite website, the JNF website adopts a narrative of silence and inaccuracies. Both websites also adopt a narrative that eerily resemble U.S. western frontier narratives whereby Israelis are constructed as "pioneers." For the sake of concision and clarity, my reading of the JNF website from now on will focus on the JNF-USA website rather than KKL version which has had very few changes in the language it has adopted. I will focus on the JNF-USA version for two main reasons: One is the fact that it is targeting specifically a U.S. audience while the other reason being that it has in the last three years, similar to the Yosemite National Park Website, gone through a significant overhaul whereby it has adopted new language that is also at times contradictory. One of the first noticeable changes is that in 2017 their Forestry section removed some of the language that was on previous versions of the website such as "pioneers" and "settlers."³¹ In the "Forestry and Green Innovation" section for example the website stated prior to 2017 that:

³¹ The KKL- JNF website to be clear still uses that language.

Israel is one of only two countries in the world that entered the 21st century with a net gain in its number of trees. But Israel was not blessed with natural forests; its forests are all hand-planted. When the **pioneers** of the State arrived, they were greeted by barren land.

This narrative frame's the landscape as barren and in need of Israelis who are "pioneers" to develop it and maintain it. In its current state, the page's usage of the term of the pioneers and barren land were removed and instead it now mentions that "once a desert nation, today Israel has blossomed into a garden oasis." This revision whereby terms such as "pioneers" and "settlers" have been expunged is telling of an awareness of the paradox that such rhetoric creates when also trying to claim indigeneity; the JNF cannot claim that it is attempting to rehabilitate a land that was neglected by Jewish exodus from it while at the same time adopting the language of discovery and of settlement. Therefore even as the website attempts to draw connections with the United states, it also attempts to distinguish its history and experience by expunging the language of colonialism and westward expansion; language that was useful at some point in drawing connections between Israel, Europe and the U.S. but that has ultimately endangered Israeli claims of Indigeneity³². Instead by changing the narrative to one that frames Israel as a once desert nation, the JNF implies that it has had a continuous presence in Palestine belying the fact that most of its citizens did not actually come from a desert nation. In addition, the process of how Israel went from a "desert nation" to an "oasis"

³² Lorenzo Veracini in "Israel- Palestine Through A Settler-Colonial Studies Lens" on the subject of Israeli claims of indigeneity asserts: "Indigeneity is always a crucial ideological battle in the politics of representation in settler-colonial contexts. The primary reason why denying someone's indigeneity is important from a settler point of view is that it relieves the settler project of the burden of effective indigenization. This is the settler-colonial logic: if no one is indigenous, if everyone has entered the contested geography at a specific point in time, then the settler claim is as good as the indigenous one. Except that settler colonialism is made of domination and displacement, they are both necessary features of this mode of domination, and a focus on displacements in this instance is specifically designed to redirect attention from ongoing structures of power." He then quotes Frantz Fanon, "the settler that brings the Native into existence," by stating, "Of course, someone was always there; what Fanon meant is that it is the settler that brings the native into existence *as native*. There is no indigeneity without settler colonialism, and there is no settler colonialism without indigeneity." (577)

is erased. The page also now has a picture of an Israeli woman touching the branch of an olive tree with the sun behind her. The picture is then followed by the question “Beautiful, isn’t it?” The use of the olive tree in a picture on the Forestry page is ironic since the JNF is known for its mass planting of pine tree which are non-native to the area and the destruction of olive trees. The pine trees are documented as being used as instruments of concealment, strategically planted by the JNF on the sites of the hundreds of Palestinian villages the Zionist militias evacuated and destroyed in 1948. The reason for the JNF’s choice of the pine tree specifically is the fact that they grow quickly and therefore were able to conceal quickly. Chaim Blass, who was employed in the JNF afforestation department asserts that there were two ideological goals behind the planting of pine trees. One was to help the economies of the kibbutz but there was also a practical element: holding the lands, so that they wouldn’t revert to Arab hands.³³ In order to do this, the JNF used heavy machinery, fire and pesticides in order to plant these pine trees³⁴. With forests sprouting up where Palestinian towns once stood, those who had been expelled would have nothing to come back to. Tourists visiting these forests for the first time, would never know that Palestinians had ever lived in these spaces. Despite this, Palestinians generally are able to tell where a Palestinian village used to be because of the sprouting of an olive tree, or cactus in these pine forests³⁵.

³³ Alon Tal, “Pollution in a Promised Land,” quotes Chaim Blass as saying “tree planting was a good way to achieve it [the holding of lands]. First of all, British law protected trees, which provided us with some legitimacy. And there was no activity that could hold land as cheaply as forests. Just a year or two’s work and the trees really didn’t need any more help” (52).

³⁴ According to Alon Tal: Fires were lit to erase any remnant of indigenous bushes, trees, and brush. Next, bulldozers were brought on to sweep away the debris; then plows prepared the soil for planting. Finally, pesticides ensured that the new pine seedlings would not be troubled by other undesirable biological activity

³⁵ There is a wealth of Palestinian literature on the symbolism of the olive tree in Palestinian culture. It has both cultural, economic and religious significance for Palestinians. The image of the dove with the olive tree branch was shared widely during the Oslo era. For Palestinian Muslims, it is a holy plant. It has also become a symbol of steadfastness that Israel is trying to repress with many images disseminated showing farmers crying over their bulldozed olives. Later on it also became a symbol of theft and claims of indigeneity when Israel suddenly started uprooting ancient olive trees and replanting them at intersections and roundabouts of settlements and Israeli cities instead of pine tree.

The JNF-USA utilizes the term “pioneers” elsewhere several times on its website mainly in its history page and old memos. In an old memo on the website for example, about forest fires in 2007, the JNF admitted that “While northern Israel, called the “green lung of the country,” is covered with trees, they were all hand-planted 2-3 generations ago by the **pioneers** of the State. It took 50 years for these forests to mature; it will take another 50 years to regain what was lost³⁶.” And on its history page it states that the “JNF is supporting a new generation of Israeli **pioneers** in fulfilling David Ben Gurion’s vision of making the desert bloom.” This usage of the term pioneer would not be abnormal if not for the fact that the narrative also uses the term “frontier” to talk about the work the JNF did in the South;

In 1965, Joseph Weitz, JNF-KKL Director of Land and Forestry from 1932-1972, shifted his gaze to the south in order to settle the **frontiers** along the Negev border. Although this is a very arid region, Weitz envisioned rolling back the desert with trees, creating a security zone for the people of Israel. ³⁷

The idea of settling “the frontiers” by planting trees in order to create “a security zone” is interesting in the way it both resembles U.S. narratives around the frontier and differs from it. On one hand, it implies a threat. As indicated earlier, in the U.S. prior to the 19th century “the frontier” conjured up images of “wilderness” infested with monsters, savages, witchery and evil. While in the case of 20 /21st century Israel, as Philip Dickinson puts it, Palestinians are framed as a “biological problem”; a disease or an infestation (299). Despite the differing designation (“monsters” vs “biological problem”) at the crux of the matter is the way the native is “othered” and framed as threat that needs to be eliminated. However, where this elimination involved a significant clearing of forests in the U.S. before certain areas were declared protected, it involved the planting of forests and the establishment of parks from the

³⁶ What was “lost” refers here to what was destroyed by a forest fire.

³⁷ Despite mentioning JNF-KKL This information is on the JNF-USA website since as mentioned earlier both entities continue to share the same history albeit the fact that the U.S. version of the history page is briefer.

start in Israel. The term “settler” also appears in the narrative “the land which had been purchased for Jewish settlement belonged to the Jewish people as a whole, and that JNF-KKL's function was to use its donations collected from Jews around the world to acquire land which would be allotted to **settlers** by inheritable leasehold.” The usage of the words “frontier,” “settlers” and “pioneers,” brings to mind Manifest Destiny, the homestead act of 1862 and U.S. western narratives around the “heroism” of settlers and pioneers who went to the frontier to explore, settle and develop the land/make the desert bloom. Similar to the JNF narrative, these narratives celebrate the act of settlement in the “frontier” as if these places were empty and uninhabited an image that relies on maintaining certain myths. These myths present the U.S and Israel as empty, unoccupied wilderness where the land is free for the taking. There is a process of the continual recession of the frontier as European -or in the JNF case, Jewish- settlements acquire more land. This frontier encounter is further characterized by the JNF as full of conflict and struggle; the land is “barren,” it is an “arid” region and although there are no mentions of encounters with Palestinians, there are mentions of encounters with the British and an implication of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict when talking about creating a “a security zone” by planting trees along borders. These conflicts like U.S. frontier myths are eventually resolved through domination and conquest, however, ultimately settlers re-emerge from the frontier experience transformed and upholding the values of self-reliance, democracy, and freedom; “The duality of land as desecrated, in pain, in need of rescue; and land as sacred, wild, and preserve-able; are contemporary discourses that justify re-invasion” (la paperson 117). In somewhat of a paradox, this duality appears in the narrative within the JNF-USA website and at times inadvertently functions as an acknowledgment of the presence of Palestinians in a skewed manner. By asserting that the land was in need of repair by “pioneers” when they arrived, the narrative implies that whoever inhabited the land up to that point had neglected it. In this way claims of ownership

of the land, become tied to Lockean theories of labor. Allan Greer in a discussion of John Locke states, "Property in land also derives from labor: in the state of nature, acorns are mine when I take the trouble to collect them, and similarly land is mine when I clear, cultivate, and fence it" (366-7) According to this logic, the Jewish settler by virtue of his labor has a claim to the land, while the Palestinian through his neglect of the land has lost his claim. This logic in the JNF narrative, however inadvertently, acknowledges the presence of Palestinians even as it accuses them of neglect of the land.

The Human Rights organization B'Tselem attempts to resist the narrative of the JNF by showcasing the way conservation is utilized to manage the Palestinian population of Jerusalem. In 2014 the Israeli Human Rights organization B'Tselem, addressing the issue of establishing parks in Israel created an interactive website that they titled "Old Bogus National Parks." The website documents the establishment of various national parks in East Jerusalem while choosing, in B'Tselem's own words, "irreverent humor" to convey the way national parks are used as a ploy to seize Palestinian land. East Jerusalem is very much at the forefront of what many have called a "demographic war." Although President Trump's recognition of Jerusalem as Israel's capital is unprecedented, the reality is that Israel has been actively working on the ground for decades to reflect that recognition. Teddy Kollek, the mayor of the contested city, said in 1968: "The object is to ensure that all of Jerusalem remains forever a part of Israel. If this city is to be our capital, then we have to make it an integral part of our country, and we need Jewish inhabitants to do that." Today, 86 percent of East Jerusalem is under direct control of the Israeli authorities and Jewish settlers. Around 200,000 settlers live in settlements that have been mostly built either entirely or partially on private Palestinian property. One of the ways that Israel has attempted to change the demographic make-up of the city is through implementing policies such as the denial of permits for Palestinian construction but also through the establishment of national parks. Through its use of satire

B'Tselem's website attempts to resist the JNF and Israeli government's narrative around national parks and turns it on its head by pointing to the absurdity of appropriating Palestinian lands by declaring them Israeli public lands and by providing as much information as possible about this process.

What is surprising about the B'Tselem website is the way in which it adopts satire as a genre to resist the JNF narrative. B'Tselem as a well-known human rights organization in Israel and Palestine, has generally produced documentary style digital media. Despite accusations that their work is merely propaganda by the Israeli right, B'Tselem has field workers documenting human rights work in Israel and Palestine as well as researchers and translators who translate Israeli governmental and NGO reports. They use a variety of means with which to document human rights abuses in the West Bank and Gaza, including a well-known videography project that has provided video documentation of human rights abuses since 2005. They had never, however, taken up satire on their website which is the main way they communicate with the public. B'Tselem in fact, in the face of mounting pressure by the Israeli government and criticism from the Israeli public, as well as attempts to delegitimize their research, rarely produces anything that is not well researched and adopts formal conventions of documentation. As such, for years they have been recipient of awards such as the Carter-Menil Award for Human Rights (1989, jointly with Al-Haq); the Danish PL Foundation Human Rights Award (2011, jointly with Al-Haq); the Stockholm Human Rights Award (2014) and the Human Rights Award of the French Republic (2018, jointly with Al-Haq) for their human rights reports. The fact that they decided to present a report on their website in 2014 to the public that differs significantly from all their other reports is therefore worth noting. We can see the difference in their communication of the issue of national parks in Israel when scrolling through the different national parks that have been established or are being established in east Jerusalem, with captions such as "One of a kind! A park boasting

absolutely no natural or archaeological attractions.” Under “Park Highlight” it satirically declares “Bring a deck of cards, there is nothing to see or do.” Beneath this satirical tone however, they adopt a more serious tone providing the reader with information and data they have researched. For example, explaining the circumstances around the establishment of Tzurim National Park, they state that “The park was declared in an area devoid of any significant archaeological findings or natural treasures” but that the “(NPA) has explained that the park is necessary for creating geographic contiguity with the Jerusalem Walls National Park, and to re-create the ancient agrarian landscape.” B’Tselem also refers several times to the practice of establishing national parks in East Jerusalem in historically Palestinian neighbourhood in order to stifle Palestinian population growth in the city. Their use of satire then seems to hint at the absurdity of utilizing national parks as an excuse to manage Palestinian population growth. In a post about a proposed new park in Jerusalem called Mount Scopus Slopes National Park, B’Tselem declares “Spectacular ‘green lung’ smothers al-‘Esawiyeh and a-Tur” and then suggests a collusion between the Jerusalem municipality and the NPA to prevent Palestinian construction in the neighbourhood in order to ensure a Jewish majority in Jerusalem by creating a contiguous bloc of land with no Palestinian population. The use of their satire therefore is not coincidental. In one way it aims to be catchy and draw the attention of the reader, in another way, it explicitly is communicating that the excuses for the establishment of these parks in East Jerusalem are “bogus,” so bogus that it should be unbelievable that they are allowed to continue.

In the U.S. we are aware of the history of National Parks and their relationship to indigenous people but we relegate it to the past. In Palestine and Israel this process is still ongoing and what these websites show is that even though claims to ownership of land differ within the narratives that the JNF and the NPS adopt, their framing of these lands as public

lands and their designation as part of the commons depends both on the continued elimination of the Native and the adoption of settler nativism³⁸.

³⁸ Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang in “Decolonisation is not a Metaphor” discuss Settler Nativism as settlers move to innocence. They adopt Vine Deloria Jr’s conceptualization of Settler nativism, or what he calls the Indian-grandmother complex, as a settler move to innocence because it is an attempt to deflect a settler identity, while continuing to enjoy settler privilege and occupying stolen land.

Chapter 2:

“A River Dies of Thirst”: Hydropolitics in Linda Hogan’s *Solar Storms* and Raja Shehadeh’s *A Rift in Time*”

“It was a river with two banks

and a heavenly mother who nursed it on drops from the clouds

But they kidnapped its mother

so it ran short of water

and died, slowly, of thirst.” –“A River Dies of Thirst”, Mahmoud Darwish

“The more water you have the stronger you are... Water is the greatest thing in the world.

Wherever water goes, there is life. So take care of it” (*Water Story* 16)³⁹.

In his last interview with foreign press in 1969, Israeli Prime Minister Levi E'shkol, in a response to a question about Palestinian right to a homeland, stated “It was only after the Zionists “made the desert bloom”” that “they [the Palestinians] became interested in taking it from us.” E’shkol after settling in Palestine in 1914 from the Ukraine, helped establish the Haganah, and then was involved with its offshoot Irgun, a Jewish terrorist organization⁴⁰ without which the ethnic cleansing of Palestine and the establishment of the State of Israel could not have been possible. E’shkol was dubbed “the land builder” owing to his legacy of establishing Kibbutzim and setting up irrigation tunnels before the foundation of the state of Israel. More importantly however, is his work in establishing Mekorot the National Israeli Water company. Mekorot initially was partially managed by the Jewish National fund and E’shkol became the director for several years. Today Mekorot continues to control access to water in Israel and the Palestinian Territories. In the U.S. for years the Standing Rock Souix have repeatedly declared “*Mni wiconi*” (water is life); a statement that sums up the centrality

³⁹ *Water Story* is a Crow tribal story that is part of the Northwest Indian Reading Project.

⁴⁰ Irgun was labelled a terrorist group and condemned by the United Nations, the British, the United States and was also condemned at the World Zionist Congress in 1946.

of water and a knowledge that whoever controls water has the power of life and death. Therefore in a settler colonial context, the control of water in itself becomes a form of what Achille Mbembe calls necropower. In the case of Israel, as the establishment of Mekarot demonstrates, the control of water from the very beginning of its foundation became a national imperative on which the very survival of the state was dependent. On its website, Mekorot proudly declares,

Mekorot has always considered the development of the State, the blooming of the desert and painting Israel green to be a national imperative...Mekorot has formulated solutions over the years, which it has implemented in infrastructure, with “every drop of” Zionist entrepreneurship and real substance. (Mekorot.co.il)

This shows that the implementation of a water infrastructure is therefore also tied up with national mythmaking. Furthermore, E’skol’s assertion that the Zionist project in Palestine had made the desert bloom, is a myth that Israel continues to reiterate in order to make claims to the land it occupied in 1948. A cornerstone of this myth is that Palestinians did not exist. This rhetoric further bolsters Zionist narratives that Palestine was an unpopulated desert before the Zionists’ arrival while also asserting the superiority of the Zionist agricultural techniques, insinuating that a state’s ability to exploit the resources of a place are a claim to that land. This myth also operates on the assumption that European Jews, being the civilized rightful owners, are bearers of the civilizing European mission to the Orient, spreading modernity, science, reason and technology (Masalha 34). By dispossessing the land of its people, this myth reduces Palestinians to a marginal nonentity (Masalha 12). Edward Said and David Barsamian write in *Culture and Resistance*:

Because so much of [the Palestinians’] history has been occluded. [They] are invisible people. The strength and power of the Israeli narrative is such that it depends almost entirely on a kind of heroic vision of pioneers who come to a desert and in the

end deal not with native people in the sense that these are people who have a settled existence and lived in towns and cities and have their own society, but rather with nomads who could be driven away. (20–1)

Although claims of Israel “making the desert bloom” have subsisted since its foundation to render Palestinians invisible, their persistence today are at the heart of narratives that attempt to represent Israel as a cutting-edge leader in water conservation around the world. Whether this claim is true or not, the politics and cost of attempting to make such a claim possible are rarely discussed.

This chapter seeks to delve into the connections between the different stakeholders implicated in the politics around water in Palestine/Israel and the United States. Historically in Israel at the time of its foundation these were the politician (E’shkol), the Militia (The Haganah), the government (The Israeli state), the Non-profit (the Jewish National Fund), and the capitalist corporation (Mekorot). Similarly in the U.S, water politics has historically included politicians, the government, capitalist corporations, non-profits, the army corps of engineers and even private land owners who were all stakeholders. In the U.S. it is harder to delineate because of the scale and longer history of settler colonialism, however, the collusion between the U.S. government and its various entities (including the federal government itself) and private corporations that extract resources from federally recognized tribal lands is well documented. Conducting a comparative study between the U.S and Israel/Palestine concerning hydropolitics is significant also because the development of water policies in Israel in the early 20th century could not have happened without the help of the U.S. Prior to the foundation of the State of Israel, U.S., engineers and soil conservationists such as Walter Clay Lowdermilk and James Hayes helped conduct surveys and make water resource plans in Palestine in order to prepare it for the settlement of Jews. Furthermore, the claim to ownership of land as a result of “greening” the desert is not unique to Israel but can

be seen in the 19th century U.S. where homesteaders would claim land through the homestead act of 1862. The process of claiming tracts of land whether in Palestine or in Israel involved securing water through various means for agricultural purposes⁴¹. By demonstrating that they had farmed the land and made improvements upon it, homesteaders were able to claim the land⁴². Therefore, claims over water rights in a settler colony on one hand can function to solidify claims to land and by extension water and on the other hand can function to establish which communities get access to water. After all, controlling where water can be accessed, means controlling where people live as well as their health and livelihoods. This chapter will explore the intersections of politics and water rights/ownership as an intentional mechanism of settler colonial infrastructure. This will focus on the connections between the settler colonial infrastructure implemented specifically by entities such as Mekorot and Achille Mbembe's "necropower"; the state's ability to decide who lives and who dies⁴³. It argues that the construction of water infrastructure by the settler colonial state is not just an attempt to increase agricultural yields, reduce desertification and mitigate access to water or an attempt at eco-friendly, water conserving policies but also is an attempt to control water and therefore control population growth. This chapter assumes Australian historian and ethnographer, Patrick Wolfe's assertion in "Settler Colonialism and the Elimination of the Native" that settler colonialism "destroys to replace" and that "settler colonizers come to stay" and therefore settler colonial "invasion is a structure not an event" (388). I argue that, hydro-projects in the U.S. and Israel, as a result of their establishment within a settler colonial framework are at their very core implicated in the necropower of the settler colonial state. Wolfe quoting Deborah Bird Rose points to the fact that "to get in the way of settler colonization, all the native has to do is stay at home." (388). It is not a leap then to argue that

⁴¹ Such as digging of wells, building of dams, and construction of water irrigation systems.

⁴² The Homestead act had several requirements including five years of continuous residence on the land, building a home on it, farming the land and making improvements.

⁴³ Achille Mbembe's necropower is discussed in chapter 1 as well.

in order for the settler colonial state to dispossess the land from its people, it needs to create conditions and laws that ensure that the native does not “stay at home.”

As Wolfe asserts, the primary motive for elimination is not race or religion but access to territory; “[t]erritoriality is settler colonialism’s specific, irreducible element” while “elimination, is an organizing principal of settler-colonial society rather than a one-off (and superseded) occurrence” (388). Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang further discuss in “Decolonization is not a Metaphor” how “the disruption of Indigenous relationships to land represents a profound epistemic, ontological, cosmological violence” (5). The building of dams, which alter the environment and change the land become a metaphor of this violence in the way that they displace Indigenous peoples and disrupt relationships with their environment. Therefore, this paper argues that the construction of Hydro-electric dams, are implicated in long-standing colonial efforts to limit Indigenous sovereignty and perpetuate what Wolfe calls the “logic of elimination” (387). These hydro-electric dams are a manifestation of power; the colonial power of one nation to dispossess and displace the people of another nation.

This chapter will utilize the term “hydropolitics” to describe the politics around water in the U.S. and Palestine/ Israel. I argue that necropower is embroiled in the hydropolitics of the settler colonial state to immiserate certain communities. The colonial control of water ensures both the dependence and the precarity of indigenous peoples and therefore determines their ability to live or not within the confines of a certain area. The chapter then, aims to explore the connections between hydropolitics, necropower and settler colonialism reflected in two texts; *Solar Storms* by Chickasaw author Linda Hogan and *A Rift in Time* by Palestinian writer Raja Shehadeh. Each of these two narratives highlight the long history of settler colonialism that make it possible for hydroelectric dams to be constructed as much or

more than the common narrative⁴⁴ of their effect on the Indigenous people and their lands. These two texts are also useful in helping redefine the term hydropolitics which has historically signified the politics around water between different states. I propose that redefining hydropolitics to include a discussion on necropower and the role of settler colonial infrastructure can displace environmental settler rhetoric that at times construes water infrastructure such as dams and desalinization projects as “green power”⁴⁵; environmentally friendly water conservation projects and a source of clean energy. Although the term environment itself is not a precise or culturally accurate term I will rely on it as an intentionally ambiguous term and will utilize it often in this chapter for the sake of space.

Although, I am interested in the way *Solar Storms* and *A Rift in Time* showcase the destruction wrought by the building of dams, what this chapter will emphasize is the two narratives reflections on settler politics that lead to the construction of these dams. I am particularly interested in the way mapmaking is tied to the remaking of the land through dams in these two narratives. As the analysis of these two literary texts will suggest, settler colonial instruments such as maps and dams can attempt to remake and violate land and water but are not ultimately successful in controlling them. That nature has the power to destabilize geographies in ways that exceed the control of the settler colony. I am particularly interested in dams because of their narrative function in both Indigenous Literature⁴⁶ and U.S. environmental writing. Both forms take up dams in similar ways as there seems to be an agreement on their destructiveness. Non-native environmental writers such as Edward

⁴⁴ Readings on the literature around dams in Indigenous writing has largely focused on their adverse effects to these communities. I propose that these two readings should actually be read as more than commentary on the negative effects of dams. Instead we need to approach how they discuss the relationship between settler colonialism and dam building.

⁴⁵ There has always been disagreements within the environmental movement about Dams. On one hand some environmentalist perceive them to be extremely damaging to our ecology. On the other, some environmentalists, including more recently “ecomodernists” perceive dams as a lesser evil source of energy than fossil fuels. Some even believe in desalinization projects as a necessary geoengineering method that needs to be developed to mitigate climate change.

⁴⁶ Both American Indian literature and Palestinian Literature.

Abbey⁴⁷ and John McPhee ⁴⁸ -who both wrote about Glenn Canyon Dam- often construct dams as problematic. McPhee and Abbey's narratives see dams as problematic not because of the way they are embroiled in the long history of settler colonialism in the U.S but rather because of their effects on the ecology and biodiversity of a certain place. Admittedly, John McPhee, similar to Native American writers, elucidates the important symbolism of water to environmentalists. In his book *Encounters with the Archdruid*, he describes the way dams to conservationists are at the absolute epicentre of hell on earth. He argues that the reason for this is that the conservation movement "is a mystical and religious force" and that its reaction is so strong "because rivers are the ultimate metaphors of existence, and dams destroy rivers. Humiliating nature, a dam is evil-placed and solid" (159). American nature writing however has typically been more concerned with lost aesthetics and lost ecology than the impact of dams on Indigenous people⁴⁹. Both McPhee and Abbey's writings on Glenn Canyon dam, focus on the beauty of Glenn Canyon before the dam floods it. There is no mention of dams as a violent infrastructure with human impact. On the contrary, these narratives construct the conversations around dams as a human versus nature divide. It is humans who want to build dams in order to access water and commodify it. The impact on humans is distant and inconsequential as it involves the loss of nature but the gain of economic prosperity. Conversations around dams in Indigenous literature on the other hand ask us to consider the cyclical relationship between humans and nature. Indigenous writing often perceives dams as an affront to nature. It is not only a structure that alters the landscape permanently and displaces indigenous communities, but also is seen as an antithesis to their spiritual and cultural beliefs. As Winona LaDuke poignantly puts it in *All Our Relations*, "Native American teachings describe the relations all around-animals, fish, trees and rocks- as our

⁴⁷ In *Desert Solitaire* though he also takes up the issue of Dams in his novel *The Monkey Wrench Gang*.

⁴⁸ In his book *Encounters of an Archdruid*, McPhee dedicates an entire chapter to the building of dams by the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation.

⁴⁹ With the exception of more recent Indigenous nature writing

brothers, sisters, uncles and grandpas... their obliteration by dams, guns, and bounties is an immense loss to Native families and Cultures”(2). Indigenous authors such as LaDuke, D'Arcy McNickle, Thomas King, and Linda Hogan describe water's sacredness and its cultural significance in their writing. Svetlana Nikitina in her essay “Dammed Dreams” asserts that “Native American writers typically find themselves on one side of the technology-nature divide, with the strong cultural bias towards partnership with (rather than dominion over) nature, which makes them see dams as sources of evil and imbalance” (153). What Nikitina however does not explicitly point to is that this bias towards nature is not only cultural but is also attributed to the understanding as well as the lived experience of the effects of this kind of infrastructure on both ecology and people. As LaDuke points out in *All Our Relations*, there is a direct relationship between the loss of cultural diversity and the loss of biodiversity. The difference in the way non-native U.S. environmental writers and Indigenous writers take up dams has literary correlates. This can be seen in the way ecocriticism takes up the environmental consequences of dams as opposed to the way Indigenous studies as a field takes it up. Joni Adamson whose book *American Indian Literature, Environmental Justice, and Ecocriticism* serves as one of the earliest meditations on this issue asserts that “Ecocritics, concerned about the increasingly evident consequences of [...] depleted aquifers, ask how literature and literary criticism can be a force for or against environmental change” (14). Indigenous literatures on the other hand serve larger ecological, environmental, and social justice goals.

My reading of *Solar Storms* and *A Rift in Time* attempts to consider the way necropower is implicated in the hydropolitics of the U.S and Israel as an inherent part of settler colonialism. How do these narratives take up the motivations behind hydroelectric projects in the U.S and Israel? In what way do they consider the implication of these kinds of infrastructure in the operation of a settler colonial apparatus? Moreover, if we are to

reconsider the term hydropolitics, in what way are these narratives useful in redefining this term? And is a redefinition of the term hydropolitics to include necropower useful in reorienting discussions around infrastructure, water politics and settler colonialism? Although these two texts are two different genres; *Solar Storms* is a novel while *A Rift in Time* is a family memoir, these two narratives each serve to displace western environmental critiques of hydroelectric dams in similar and important ways. Before I shift to the close reading of *A Rift in Time* and *Solar Storms*, I want to start by attempting to define the term hydropolitics.

Hydropolitics, Necropower and Hydroelectric Power

John Waterbury first coined the term hydropolitics in his 1979 book *Hydropolitics of The Nile Valley*, to describe water politics alongside the Nile basin. By 1999 Arun P. Elhance in *Hydropolitics in the Third World: Conflict and Cooperation in International River Basins* defined hydropolitics as “the systematic study of conflict and cooperation between states over water resources that transcend international borders” (3). The term hydropolitics is often associated with the politics around water pertaining specifically to the construction of hydroelectric dams and all the complexities that arise from this kind of infrastructure. One of the issues pertaining to this term, is the way it has typically been taken up to describe politics around water bodies that are shared by several countries. As such, this definition can be somewhat reductive as it privileges modern conceptions of borders; borders that historically were formed as a result of colonization and therefore does not take into account the way dams are infrastructures that are utilized by the settler colonial state to immiserate vulnerable communities, particularly Indigenous Peoples. A redefined hydropolitics is therefore useful, because it invites a conversation and pushes for a deeper understanding around the importance of water in social political contexts and concepts of sovereignty that go beyond nation and the nation state.

In the U.S, water remains a source of conflict between different stakeholders in Indigenous communities and the U.S. government along with special interest stakeholders. This has been very publicly demonstrated by the protests around the construction of the Dakota Access Pipeline by the Standing Rock Sioux tribe in North Dakota in 2015-16, as well as ongoing calls to demolish dams and restore salmon runs by tribes in the Pacific Northwest. These protests and the events surrounding the construction of the pipeline demonstrate that issues around Indigenous rights and sovereignty are still under threat by the U.S. settler colonial state and that tribal treaties continue to be broken as governments continually redefine their own artificial and arbitrary borders. As such I argue for a definition of hydropolitics that takes into account specifically the way necropower functions within the politics around the construction of dams in a settler colonial context.

Achille Mbembe in his essay “Necropolitics” builds on Michel Foucault’s critique of sovereignty and its relation to war and biopower. He asserts that the ultimate expression of sovereignty resides in the power to dictate who lives and who dies (11). Mbembe questions the sufficiency of the notion of biopower in taking into account the contemporary ways in which the political, under the guise of war and terror, makes the murder of the enemy its primary objective. Mbembe introduces necropower as an alternative framework that operates during a colonial occupation by defining “who matters and who does not, who is disposable and who is not” (27). As he argues, Foucault’s concept of biopower is insufficient in addressing contemporary forms of domination and violence. In the context of late-modern colonial occupation for example, he argues that biopolitics and necropolitics are combined in the disciplinary structure of the state. “To exercise sovereignty is to exercise control over mortality and to define life as a deployment and manifestation of power” (12). Borrowing from Frantz Fanon’s *The Wretched of the Earth*, Mbembe describes the spatialization of colonial occupation as constituting a division of space into compartments. This includes

setting boundaries and borders, regulated by police, soldiers and checkpoints usually through presence and force (26). To Mbembe, the colonial occupation of Palestine is a contemporary paradigm of the operations of necropower. He presents three major characteristics of necropower in this colonial occupation. First is “territorial fragmentation,” where the sealing off and expansion of settlements happens in order to hinder movement. Second is the implementing of what Mbembe calls “vertical sovereignty” where the occupation operates “Over” and “Under” the terrain “The ground itself is divided between its crust and the subterrain. Colonial occupation is also dictated by the very nature of the terrain and its topographical variations (hilltops and valleys, mountains and bodies of water)” (28). The third, is a “splintering occupation” where fragmentation is used to separate Israelis from Palestinians and Palestinians from each other “a splintering form of colonial occupation is characterized by a network of fast bypass roads, bridges, and tunnels that weave over and under one another in an attempt at maintaining the Fanonian ‘principle of reciprocal exclusivity’” (28). Under the condition of “vertical sovereignty” and “splintering colonial occupation” Mbembe asserts that communities “are separated across a y-axis” (29). Meaning sites of violence are proliferated. Although Mbembe does not take up dams as infrastructure in favour of traditional forms of infrastructure such as bypass roads, bridges and tunnels, I suggest that dams are also a site of violence. The construction of hydroelectric dams by the settler colonial state is generally labelled as water irrigation being provided to communities in traditionally arid spaces with little access to water and a project where energy is both produced and sold, but from a hydropolitical lens and taking into account necropower, it is also integral to the zoning and rezoning of spaces and what Mbembe calls “territorial fragmentation” in order for the settler colonial state to exercise its power.

Mbembe’s “Necropolitics” and his concept of necropower give context to the purpose and reason for why settler colonialism constructs its infrastructure in specific ways.

Infrastructure Studies as a subfield of Geography has demonstrated that certain kinds of infrastructures within settler colonialism can be insidious as they are normalised, hidden and often perceived as permanent and part of a background landscape (Graham 2010).

Infrastructure Studies as a field has been traditionally interested in issues around inequitable access and more recently with issues around the infrastructure of surveillance technology. It is important to note however that conversations in Infrastructure Studies often revolve around urban spaces with very little attention to spaces on the margin like the ones emphasized in the two texts this chapter investigates. Discussions around what is termed “infrastructural warfare” often focus on the capacity of settler colonialism to destroy, sabotage and immobilize the infrastructure of the people it is colonizing. They do not however, take into account the way infrastructure contributes to “the elimination of the native.” As Patrick Wolfe argues, settler colonialism “is an inclusive, land-centred project that coordinates a comprehensive range of agencies, from the metropolitan centre to the frontier encampment, with a view to eliminating Indigenous societies. Its operations are not dependent on the presence or absence of formal state institutions or functionaries” (393). British scholar Stephan Graham, one of the few scholars in Infrastructure Studies who explores the relays of colonial power and infrastructure, in his book *When Infrastructure Fails*, argues that infrastructure creates new spatial conceptualisations that are a part of colonial incorporation. As Graham has pointed out infrastructure can move or colonize over time. Despite its focus on urban spaces, he asserts that although infrastructure is often perceived as a backdrop, they are very visible to vulnerable communities because of the role they play in immiserating them.

Close Reading of *Solar Storms*:

This is central to the narrative of Linda Hogan’s 1995 novel *Solar Storms*. Set in northern Minnesota, along the borders with Canada, Hogan’s novel takes up the issue of

transformation of landscape and environmental devastation to the land as a result of settler colonialism. The novel deals with the infrastructure project of dam building in North America. Hogan explores the devastating effects of dams on Indigenous communities as well as the way these Indigenous communities come together in an attempt to resist the dam's construction and respond to the far-reaching consequences it has on the ecosystem around it. What is valuable about *Solar Storms*, however, is its long meditation on the relationship between dam building and settler colonialism as a project. It is also valuable in the way it demonstrates the importance of rethinking the definition of hydropolitics to be more inclusive of arbitrary and continuously shifting borders. A recurring motif in *Solar Storms* and Hogan's work in general is that water⁵⁰ -despite human attempts to define and harness it - knows no borders. A frequent metaphor in modern American Indian fiction is that of the "obstructed water." Dams hold certain association in these fictions; destruction of land, abrogation of treaty rights, exploitation of Native Americans (Donaldson 74). There are also ascribed attributes of water in these fictions; ones that Linda Hogan draws on in *Solar Storms*. A common attribute of water is as sustainer of life⁵¹, but it is also a cleansing agent, both restorative and destructive. Hogan shows the way hydropolitics affects two indigenous communities in particular; one in Canada and one in the U.S. and the environmental devastation wrought on these communities as a result of the construction of a dam. Through this, *Solar Storms* demonstrates the transcendence of water beyond borders and reiterates the limits of the standard understanding of the term hydropolitics.

⁵⁰ Analyzing the works of writers such as Linda Hogan, Gretel Erlich, Brenda Peterson, and others; Pamela Mittlefehldt emphasizes the depth of symbolism encoded in water in Native American writing. She asserts that water serves as "muse, medium, and metaphor," channels creativity and "invites exploration of the bonds between women" (139).

⁵¹ John Donaldson in "As Long as the Waters Shall Run: The "Obstructed Water" Metaphor in American Indian Fiction" asserts that ascribed attributes of water in American Indian fiction are Universal element, mediator between earth and air, ongoing and discernable cyclic process, origin and sustainer of life, unfathomable deep. (74)

In Hogan's *Solar Storms*, the protagonist, Angel returns to her ancestral homeland after the government bureaucracy sends her to foster care in Oklahoma. Her great-grandmother Agnes, her great-great-grandmother Dora-Rouge, and her step-grandmother Bush are important parts of the narrative and Angel's meditation on her broken and then mended relationships with them becomes a metaphor of her feelings of both alienation and belonging. Upon Angel's arrival to Adam's Rib she ruminates on the effects of colonialism on the ecology of Adam's Rib, describing a "place where water was broken apart by land, land split open by water so that the maps showed places both bound and . . . boundless . . . in an ancient pact, now broken" (21). While staying at Adam's Rib, Angel reconnects with her Indigenous roots and through Bush learns her communities' way of life. As she finally starts healing from the traumas of the U.S. foster care system, this is interrupted by the arrival of two young men informing Bush of protests to the building of a dam up north (presumably Canada). Bush decides to join the protestors working to prevent the BEEVCO electric company from completing the dam project that has already begun flooding Indigenous lands. What ensues is a journey of three generations of women in Angel's family. They travel by canoe from the northern boundary waters of the United States to Canada to help an Indigenous nation named the Fat-Eaters (also called the Beautiful People in the novel) by joining the protest. To get there, Bush and Angel attempt to retrace Dora Rouge's (Angel's great grandmother) journey back to her tribe in the North. This act of retracing is fundamental within the novel as it showcases both indigenous knowledge of the landscape as well as settler colonial interruption of that very landscape. Once there, they find themselves reconnecting with lost relatives and fighting BEEVCO.⁵² *Solar Storms* is often seen as a fictionalization of the Cree people's relationship with water and their fight for water rights in

⁵² Hogan bases BEEVCO and the events around the construction of the dam upon an existent company; Hydro-Québec, which developed the dam at James Bay, flooding Indigenous lands (Castor 158).

Quebec in the 1970s as it mirrors protests by the Cree that halted construction of a dam, but only after much of their Indigenous lands and environment had been destroyed.

For Angel, the act of retracing her great-grandmother's journey back to the fat-eaters becomes a rumination on both settler colonial transformation of the landscape as well as the arbitrariness of borders. This arbitrariness is further cemented in the novel, through its reflections on maps and mapmaking. While Bush prepares for the canoe trip to the Fat Eaters land, she pours over old and new maps trying to figure out a way through. In the end, she discovers that the maps that she values so highly are false. The novel points to the way the land refuses to be moulded by these maps as it constantly changes and transforms. This can be seen in a moment when Bush studies one of the maps then,

laughed out loud at the ignorance of Europeans. Out of the blue she said, “Beavers. None of them ever considered how beavers change the land.” She was right. Beavers were the true makers of the land. It was through their dams that the geographies had been laid, meadows created, through their creation that young trees grew, that deer came, and moose. All things had once depended on them. (123)

The narrative asks us therefore to consider how one can rely on the permanence of maps in an ever changing landscape where even a beaver can divert a river and change the topography. In an ironic moment in the novel, it is the act of diverting the river by humans that ends up changing the topography with unforeseen consequences. The diversion of the Big Arm river into the Se Nay renders Bush's maps obsolete. “Bush tried to see the large picture, but it seemed impossible. She checked the pieces of maps that were, by now, committed to her memory, as if there were something she might have missed. She tried to figure out the lay of the land, to predict what we'd find” (192). Angel comments on the “different topographies” of Bush's maps is Hogan's way of emphasizing that perspective matters in the making of maps. Contesting claims of maps as an objective or “scientific” representation of land, Hogan

shows their inconsistencies and inaccuracies, that they are a fiction; an attempt to make that which is constantly changeable fixed. Angel reflects on the falsehood of these maps as they are “only as accurate as the minds of their makers and those had been men possessed with the spoils of this land, men who believed California was an island” (122). Hogan critiques colonial maps by pointing to all their omissions,

But of course they were not true, they were not the people or animal lives or the clay of land, the water, the carnage. They didn't tell those parts of the story. What I liked was that land refused to be shaped by the makers of maps. Land had its own will. The cartographers thought if they mapped it, everything would remain the same, but it didn't, and I respected it for that. (123)

Instead the narrative points to an understanding that local Indigenous knowledge surpasses what can be represented on paper by outsiders⁵³. It asks us to consider that the earth has more than “one dimension” and what “we see is only the first layer” (123). As a result of these maps, the trip takes longer and they are faced with unexpected topographies that lead to Agnes's death. Maps, the novel points out, like the humans who create them are flawed and are formed by imperialists who distort history and fail to include indigenous knowledges of the lands they dominated. This distortion of history is an act of elimination of native presence on this continent and is part and parcel of the violent process of colonization ⁵⁴.

Solar Storms also illustrates the relationship between Non-native mapmaking, the continuous exploitation of Native lands and environmental destruction. As Hogan showcases, the way maps are drawn fails to show environmental destruction, but can end up being responsible for that very destruction. Angel commenting on a map of the proposed sites for

⁵³ Kelli Lyon Johnson calls attention to this in “Writing Deeper Maps” .

⁵⁴ In “Unmapping Adventure: Sewing Resistance in Linda Hogan’s *Solar Storms*” T. Christine Jespersen argues that “although maps centre on “tricks and lies,” in the corners are important remnants of indigenous histories. The maps betray the roles that they played in enslaving Native peoples, lands, and water” (281).

the dam states “Some areas were outlined in blue, other sections were covered with blue stripes that looked as if they could have been shadows of trees across winter whiteness. The map showed the dried riverbed above us where water has once flowed, where they had diverted the Child River into a bay” (278). What this map does not reveal is the environmental devastation of these blue lines and stripes:

[T]here would be no fishing camp because the fish were contaminated from the damming of water and mercury had been released from the stones and rotting vegetation. Then a surge of water flooded once-fertile plains. Because of the early thaw and new roads that crossed the migration routes of animals, spring camp next year would not be fruitful, and people were already worried about food. (273–74)

Since the ecology of the place is not depicted on the European map, they are invisible and therefore can be destroyed all the more easily by the construction of the dam as their existence, the migration routes, the planting grounds, are not acknowledged. Dora-Rouge throughout their journey encourages Bush to abandon these maps stating “Maps are only masks over the face of God. There are other ways around the world” (138). The novel points to the futility of these maps when at some point in the midst of their trip they crumble and fall apart, as the maps crumble, Dora-Rouge in response laughs and tells Bush to throw the map away (173). It is at that moment that Bush eventually gives in and instead of relying on colonial maps, they rely on Dora-Rouge's indigenous knowledge and memory to traverse the rivers and find their way through. Through this reflection on maps, the narrative asks us to prioritize indigenous knowledge and contemplate the deeper connections between nature and landscape. Through its meditation on the changing landscapes and the falsehood of maps, it also asks us to reconsider our definitions of borders. If landscapes are continuously changing, then does that not mean that borders can change too? If so, then what are the implications of

this change on the hydropolitics between different nations and tribes? Contemplating these questions, gives rise to importance of rethinking traditional notions of hydropolitics.

Hogan demonstrates the relays of necropower and hydropolitics in the narrative through a description in a passage of the dynamics between the different stakeholders in the novel. Tulik and Angel's family attend a town meeting with BEEVCO. In this meeting, tribal members, BEEVCO engineers and workers as well as environmentalists gather to discuss BEEVCO's plans to build the dam. In a sardonic moment, the narrative reflects on the environmentalists attending the meeting and the tension between them and the tribe. The young "white man" from New York welcomes the tribal members to a meeting in their own town, orders them to "sign in," and consumes all of Bush's attention to the point of discomfort since she could not greet anyone else. "He was fervent" Angel reflects, "his face flushed with an inner fire, the kind I recognize now as an intensity that didn't always have our needs at heart" (278). Although the environmentalist and the tribe's interest align in that moment, the novel suggests that this alliance is not necessarily permanent and unconditional. By describing the young man from New York's action in such a way, Hogan points to the common "white saviour complex" issue as well as the tendency to take over and attempt to lead rather than follow. This dynamic reflects a problematic relationship between environmentalists and Indigenous peoples that often results in conflict around the failure of the environmentalists to understand or respect Indigenous knowledges and ways of life.

Hogan further demonstrates through this meeting the common excuses used by contractors and governmental officials to justify the damage wrought on Indigenous communities and their environment. There is a moment in the novel where the head contractor shakes hands with Tulik (a relative of Dora Rouge and a tribal member) and tells him "We were hired to do this" as an excuse. "His words made clear," Angel reflects, "that if the corporation and government had their ways, the Indian people had no say on this matter, no power to reverse

what had already been decided by men with other ways, men in other rooms and house of law, men with other skins” (280). Despite the fact that the novel gestures several times to a hope in the power of law to stop the dam (the novel ends with the dam being stopped by courts), in that moment the novel cynically doubts the power of the court and admits that the laws followed in these courts are white men laws⁵⁵. The narrative highlights the fact that the government officials and contractors distinguish between the people residing there and their landscape. The landscape “For the builders,” Hogan writes, was “the flat, two-dimensional world of paper” (279). As for its people, Hogan stresses their invisibility to these “builders.” They are called “remnants of the past” (280) who reject the economic prosperity and development the dam will produce. Angel ruminates that to these invaders with their hydroelectric projects, who were all “new here, we were people who had no history, who lived surrounded by what they saw as nothingness. Their history had been emptied of us, and along with us, of truth” (280). Despite the attempts to relegate them to invisibility, the Fat Eaters resist the construction of the dam and the narrative emphasizes the importance of this resistance while forewarning the alternative “not to stand in their way was a greater loss when they were making new geographies, the kind nature would never have dreamed or wanted, ones that would open us into a future we couldn't yet know” (314). This anxiety within the novel over new geographies and unknown future, reflects a fear of a future where indigenous presence is erased. The dam the novel implies, does not just endanger these communities livelihoods, it erases these communities from the map and removes their rights to their ancestral land, Hogan therefore situates the struggle against BEEVCO in the context of necropower and imperial conquest.

⁵⁵ In their article ““Beyond All Age”: Indigenous Water Rights in Linda Hogan’s Fiction,” Lindsey Smith and Trever Holland assert that “the fight for water depicted in *Solar Storms* demonstrates a common lack of governmental acknowledgment that tribes rightfully claim both resources and land” (66).

The struggle against BEEVCO does not just work within the novel to expose the damaging effects of the construction of the dam, but also to point out to the way that Indigenous communities' fight for their sovereignty is tied to their fight for their water rights. While travelling north, Angel encounters rivers that had been diverted creating strong dangerous currents. "As we neared the Se Nay River, our plans to bypass it had to be given up...The river itself was now the force of two rivers, the Big Arm River having been diverted into the Se Nay" (191). The text here, mirroring a common motif in American Indian writing, emphasizes the agency of water; that the rivers having been diverted and the ensuing environmental devastation had disturbed an equilibrium. Angel's reflections as she journeys through the boundary waters is also emblematic of the before mentioned issue of borders and the narrow definition of hydropolitics. Hogan makes it clear that water rights are fundamental to Indigenous sovereignty in general and are in reality about more than just water. The fight for water rights and indigenous sovereignty Hogan points out, is not the fight of one tribe in isolation. Bush, who decides to head north and protest the dam, is Chickasaw⁵⁶ and ends up helping the Fat Eaters lead the fight. The narrative therefore implicitly exposes a broader problem that undermines sovereignty for tribes; attempting to isolate Indigenous communities and their struggles. While travelling north by canoe to join the protests, they find themselves having to shift course several times not only because of the transformed landscape but also because of a roadblock and checkpoints that were attempting to isolate the Indigenous communities from each other as well as from protestors. The novel points to the fact the environmental damage caused by dams and imperial conquest does not affect one community in isolation but affects all communities and the consequences of diverting rivers will be shared by all. A key moment that displays the consequences of this is when the four

⁵⁶ Linda Hogan like her character is also Chickasaw, a fact that has brought into question by some critics the politics of representation around *Solar Storms*, with the critique being that Linda Hogan is Chickasaw writing about a different Indigenous nation, the Cree.

women discover that they must attempt to go down the Se Nay river in order to reach their destination. Emphasizing the agency of water once again, Hogan describes the river's wrath at being diverted "It's angry," Dora Rouge says referring to the Se Nay river, "The rivers are angry, both of them" (192). Despite this, they decide to travel the river anyways, and Dora Rouge makes a pact with the river; that if it gave her safe passage, she would give up her desired death, the very reason she embarked on that journey in the first place, in order to fight for the river. Instead as their journey continues, Agnes falls sick and dies on the journey north instead of her mother which Dora Rouge believes is a result of her pact with the river. The far-reaching consequences of dam-building are also shown through a description of the ecological damage that the dam inflicts. Once the dam is built, and rivers are diverted and pressure in the dam accumulates, eventually the dam fails and water floods Bush's home on Fur Island and Adam's Rib damaging everything in its path. Water, the narrative contends, can not be diverted and tamed the way humans intended. It would continuously change and reshape the land. In time Angel reminds us the land "would be angry land" and it would attempt "to put an end to the plans for dams and drowned rivers." Angel concludes that, "The Indian people would be happy with the damage, with the fact that water would do what it wanted and in its own way. What water didn't accomplish, they would" (224). Hogan's narrative therefore suggests that the struggle for Indigenous peoples is not just a struggle for water rights, but for the rights of the water and respect for its nature. A central theme that the narrative reiterates throughout, is the broken pact between humans and nature and the disrespect to water in the attempts to commodify it. Even though the characters in the novel vacillate between moments of panic at the destruction of their homes and ecology, and moments of awe at the destructive nature and power of "obstructed water" and its ability to resist in a way they cannot, there is also a sense of appreciation despite it all of the cleansing nature of water. As Angel succinctly puts it "water wanted all things equal, level and

contained” (338) and after all, as her grandmother Agnes once taught her, “the whole world was covered in water” (350).

Solar Storms is not just about a dam and changes that will come, it is about erasing a landscape along with its history and people. Bush and the Fat Eaters fail to stop the construction of the dam, they continue their fight through legal battles in an attempt to assuage a history of colonialism that endures in environmental policies and actions. The definition of hydropolitics as politics around water that transcends international borders assumes fixed borders whereas the novel demonstrates water has no regard for borders and boundaries as borders are nothing more than lines drawn on a map. *Solar Storms* suggests therefore that settler colonial maps and infrastructure are reifications of a settler colonial fantasy, one of ownership and of mastery which appears in an “objective” manner in the form of the dam or the map. However, this very abstraction of the land amplifies the impermanence of these new geographies as the attempt to control the water unleashes its power that is both damaging and potentially reparative. Hydropolitics as a term then should reflect the way water complicates the politics around borders. This is further demonstrated in Raja Shehadeh’s family memoir *A Rift in Time* in which he ruminates on the effects of Israeli colonial occupation on the Jordan river and more broadly the Jordan Valley as a whole. Similar to *Solar Storms*, *A Rift in Time* also suggests the impermanence of settler colonialisms new geographies and their manifestation in maps.

One of the very first Zionist hydro- projects in Palestine was the construction of the Degania Dam in the early 1930s before the establishment of the state of Israel in 1948 as part of the Naharayim Rutenberg hydroelectric power plant project. The dam which is a small barrage across the Jordan River just below the Sea of Galilee regulates water levels in the Sea of Galilee and flows into the lower Jordan River. Its floodgates have only been opened once since then; in May 2013 in order to replenish the river Jordan. As a result of this dam and

Israel's National Water Carrier, the Jordan's volume today is just five per cent of its historical flow. Raja Shehadeh bears witness to this in *A Rift in Time* by contrasting its flow when his uncle Najib crossed it fleeing the Ottomans and his own crossing to retrace his step. Shehadeh, who is founder of Al-Haq Human Rights organization and an Orwell Prize-winning activist, is currently one of the most internationally acclaimed Palestinian writers. His two most prominent texts *Palestinian Walks: Notes on a Vanishing Landscape* (2007) and *A Rift in Time: Travels with My Ottoman Uncle* (2010), are a combination of memoir, nature and historical writing and have been widely celebrated for both their political and ecocritical commentary. Moreover, ever since *Palestinian Walks* won the Orwell Prize in 2008, postcolonial scholars have turned their attention to Palestinian literary engagements with the environment.⁵⁷ Raja Shehadeh in *A Rift in Time* attempts to piece together family stories about a great uncle (Najib) who was escaping from Ottoman authorities towards the end of their control of Palestine. Shehadeh's narrative therefore is about two journeys; the escape of his great-uncle from 1915 to 1917 from the Ottomans into the Rift Valley, and Shehadeh's own attempt at retracing that journey. As the title of the book indicates, the story is about two rifts, one of geography (the Jordan Valley rift) and another of time. It takes thirteen years for Shehadeh to retrace his uncle's journey as a result of the renaming of places, the destruction of many of those places during and after 1948 and the fact that the route from the West Bank to Damascus now involves crossing borders. It is not only that his uncle once crossed (the River Jordan) using only his horse, with no need for a passport or visa while Shehadeh now has to cross "border, after border, after border" to reach the same place that angers Shehadeh. It is also the fact that the river has almost dried up;

⁵⁷ This can be seen in the works of Kennedy, 2012; Salmi, 2012; Spencer, 2010.

The River Jordan once brought 1.3 billion cubic meters of water to the Dead Sea every year. It fed over 100 pumps drawing water to irrigate more than 10,000 dunums (a dunum is 1,000 square metres) of land that were cultivated on its western bank. It was still possible in 1847 to take a boat down the length of its course. A British naval officer, Thomas Howard Molyneux, sailed from Lake Tiberias to the Dead Sea, hoping to map the region... Since the river's sources were diverted by Israel and to a lesser extent, Jordan in recent times, the 1.3 billion cubic metres have dropped to less than 200 million... A few times in recent years the river has almost dried up altogether due to shortage of rainfall. (58)

The diversion of the River Jordan water has had serious consequences as he further elaborates in his narrative. Because a greater percent of this diminished quantity is run-off from agricultural communities and salt water, this has had an effect on the ecology and the quality of the water Palestinian can access⁵⁸. The shrinking of the Jordan, Shehadeh points out, has contributed to the rapid shrinking of the Dead Sea (58). This reduced flow, along with the water's heavy pollution, has disturbed the biodiversity of the entire Jordan Valley.

Shehadeh's act of retracing his uncle's journey into exile shares similarities with Angel's retracing of her great-grandmother's journey even as it differs in form and genre. His attempt to retrace his uncle's journey seems to be born out of a similar desire to reconnect with a landscape that has been altered significantly. One of the more significant differences however, is that while *Solar Storms* is a representational fiction, Shehadeh's act of retracing is a memoir that mirrors western travel writing. Charlotta Salmi in "Reflections on a National Cartography" notes Shehadeh's adoption of many of the tropes of the orientalist colonial

⁵⁸ Jan Selby in "Dressing up Domination as 'Cooperation'" states that most of the Jordan's water is used before it reaches the West Bank, meaning that Palestinians are "effectively denied access" to it (124).

travelogue during his retracing (437). She points to his dependence on following the routes of his literary predecessors; that of his uncle Najib's discarded novel and Lawrence of Arabia's letters as a guide. Salmi is critical of the way throughout the narrative Shehadeh often slips into a similar pastoral mode, whereby he emphasizes movement and expanse, romanticizing the Bedouin for their nomadic lifestyle in the process and therefore suggesting a nomadic approach to belonging, prioritizing the mobility and freedom of "time spent in the wilderness" over a carefully bounded territory (438). Shehadeh's emphasis on movement, mobility and freedom also ties into his investigation of clues from a past he believes had a better outlook than the present— in this case the Ottoman era, which Shehadeh argues in the book is a regime that "might [have] need[ed] reforming but ... was a multi-ethnic system that never attempted to colonise the land" (21). This multi-ethnic system, Salmi argues, is reflected "in the geography Shehadeh attempts to narrate, using the large geological rift as a metaphor to "imaginatively recreate the region" as it was in Ottoman times, "undivided"" (437). She further points to Shehadeh's usage of past narratives and the geological phenomenon of the rift to "write an idealized borderless landscape which perpetually renews itself as a natural wonder, eliding ethnic fixing" (438). Although I agree with Salmi's assertion that the rift valley can be interpreted as a metaphor of an undivided region, I depart from her reading of Shehadeh's narration of geological phenomenon of the rift as a space that elides ethnic fixing. I read Shehadeh's focus on the region of the rift valley as part of an environmental concern and as a means to retrace and reimagine an ecology before its radical transformation as a result of colonialism. His focus on the rift valley I argue is part of a larger discussion on the connections between settler colonialism, environmental degradation and hydropolitics.

In his attempt to piece together his family's stories, Shehadeh finds himself in a situation similar to Hogan's protagonist Angel. Retracing his uncle's footsteps was at times

daunting, not only because of the way the land has transformed after half a century of Israeli colonial occupation, but also because similar to Bush in Hogan's narrative, he discovers that maps had been altered to conform to a settler colonial status quo. Shehadeh's journey in retracing his great-uncle's footsteps presents the region prior to the division of the post-Ottoman countries by the colonial powers. The geographical lines drawn then, define the region today. Shehadeh writes:

Under the Ottomans on the eve of the First World War there was no administrative unit called Palestine. Haifa, Acre, Safad and Tiberias were part of the Beirut sanjaq (an administrative subdivision of a vilayet or province). South of that, including Jaffa, Gaza and Jerusalem, was the independent sanjaq of Jerusalem ... south eastern parts of Palestine were included in the sanjaq of Maan and all of these were part of the vilayet of Greater Syria. The River Jordan did not delineate a political border. (Shehadeh)

A Rift in Time therefore begins with an important theme; the significance of naming and renaming, with a reminder that Palestine had been mapped and named not by those native to the area but by those colonizing it who disregarded native names. "Naming a place anew," explains critical cartographer J.B. Harley, "is a widely documented act of political possession in settlement history" (178-79). Offering such examples as the "Hebraizing" of Arab names on Jewish maps of Palestine and the Anglicizing of Irish place names on English maps, Harley concludes by saying that the name of a familiar place in a foreign tongue "must be like being written out of history" (179). To relate this to necropower this naming then becomes a tool in the settler infrastructure that can lead to the death of place along with its culture and people, whole villages and towns are erased as if they never were. Unlike Bush in *Solar Storms* who is able to discard these maps in favour of Dora Rouge's knowledge, Shehadeh finds himself having to rely on an Israeli map to retrace his uncle Najib's footsteps.

“I have been able to find only one official Israeli map where all the Palestinian villages existing before 1948 are shown. Next to many of those appears the sinister Hebrew word *harous* (destroyed)” (5). Making his task more difficult is the fact that many of the places his uncle took refuge in prior to 1948 have been reduced to rubble. In this sense the maps Shehadeh utilizes are triply violent. For one they showcase the destruction of Palestinian villages and are a reminder of the destruction wrought by the events of 1948. They also function to erase Palestinian presence in the land and make it impossible for future generations to retrace their ancestor’s steps. And lastly, they force Palestinians to utilize them since as Shehadeh indicates there is no alternative to them.

Rafi Segal and Eyal Weizman in their introduction of the book *A Civilian Occupation: The Politics of Israeli Architecture* state that in the last century a different kind of warfare has been radically altering the landscape of Israel/ Palestine. Architecture and planning are instrumentalized by Israel, and these decisions according to them “do not follow a criteria of economic sustainability, ecology or efficiency of services, but are rather employed to serve strategic and political agendas” (19). Weizman and Segal make a crucial point about the conflict in Israel/ Palestine, they state:

The relationship between the landscape and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is symbiotic. The terrain dictates the nature, intensity and focal points of confrontation, while the conflict itself is manifested most clearly in the processes of transformation, adaptation, construction and obliteration of the landscape and the built environment.

(19)

As mentioned earlier Mbembe argues, Foucault’s concept of biopower is insufficient in addressing contemporary forms of domination and violence. In the context of late-modern colonial occupation for example, he argues that biopolitics and necropower are combined in the disciplinary structure of the state. “To exercise sovereignty is to exercise control over

mortality and to define life as a deployment and manifestation of power” (12). Taking into account both Mbembe’s necropower and Wolfe’s assertions on settler colonialism’s logic of elimination in order to erase indigeneity, the disposability of the Palestinian is of particular importance considering assertions by Israeli statesmen around Palestinian population control. By framing Palestinians as a “demographic threat”, Israeli politicians press the importance of the need to disinherit and disperse the Palestinians, make them disappear or render them invisible. The framing of Palestinians as a “demographic threat” that needs to be eliminated has had an effect on the way Israeli infrastructure is built and environmental policies and infrastructures have been implicated within this⁵⁹. These architectural structures attempt to give an impression of colonial permanence, against which stand the Palestinians who are narrated as a biological problem and a population threat. Philip Dickinson in “Raja Shehadeh’s *Palestinian Walks* and the Concrete Ecology of Settlement, Interventions” calls this “a colonial ecology” a built ecology that is a constructed to further the territorial interests of the colonizing power “and that affords different possibilities of spatial practice and lived experience for the bodies inhabiting the different strata of its racial and ethnic hierarchy” (297). He points to the different affective design of infrastructures in a colonial space. Certain infrastructures, he argues, such as roads, highways and transportation systems are perceived to affectively connect people, however, as part of colonial ecology, networks of infrastructure are not about “the flow of resources” as much as they are about “blockage” and “closure.” He then points to Israeli journalist Amira Hass who explains that the motivation of “closure” in Palestine is to lead to its economic dependency upon Israel which, coupled with the non-dissolvable Israeli presence such infrastructure establishes, weakens the viability of an autonomous Palestinian polity (Hass 7). The Israeli settlement plan exemplifies this in the

⁵⁹ Chapter one showcases the way the Israeli conservation movement with the Israeli state to dispossess Palestinians of their land.

sense that they are massive infrastructure projects and showcase how well planned Israeli territorial expansion is. Shehadeh reflects on this by asserting that

The Israelis have perfected the art of “maintained uncertainty,” which consists of repeatedly extending and then contracting, through an unpredictable combination of changing and selectively enforcing regulations and controls, the space in which Palestinians can maneuver. This exacts a heavy psychological toll, inducing a sense of perpetual temporariness. At the same time, the proliferation of settlements, bypasses, and roadblocks that Israel constructs has succeeded in convincing the occupied of the permanence of the fragmentation, as if a truly new geography had been put into place. (Shehadeh 82)

Shehadeh’s assertion therefore echoes Stephan Grahams claims about the insidiousness of colonial infrastructure that aims to give an impression of permanence.

This impression of permanence is one that Shehadeh attempts to push back against through his descriptions of the rift valley and the River Jordan. He resists perceptions of the River Jordan as a natural border between Israel/Palestine and Jordan “The river [Jordan] is no more a border than the great fault. The only borders are in people’s minds, artificial creations” (55), and he remembers a time when he could get from Ramallah to Amman in 90 minutes with only a tremor as the car went over the wooden planks of the bridge over the river marking their arrival in Jordan. Salmi points to the metaphor of the rift valley as Shehadeh’s deconstruction of ethnic tensions “providing a metaphor of unification in a region of political rifts by recalling the landscape” when it was all under one regime (438). Through this metaphor Salmi argues, citizenship is defined not by ethnic traits but by a unifying geography. It is only after June 1967 he stresses that “the River Jordan became a political border, more for the symbolic value than military necessity” (59). Ecocritical scholarship on Palestine has traditionally focused on terrestrial features of the environment (such as soil,

olive trees) and has largely ignored hydropolitics in Israel and Palestine⁶⁰. By ignoring Palestinian hydropolitics, literary criticism diverges significantly from activism and politics, in which the role of water in the Palestinian- Israeli conflict is a prominent issue⁶¹.

Shehadeh's comparison of the River Jordan's past condition to its present condition also functions to show how hydropolitics is tied up with necropower. As a result of settler colonialism, access to the waters of the river Jordan become a site of contestation. The river becomes an excuse utilized to ensure certain living conditions are not met within the rift valley region so as to control population growth of the Palestinian community that resides there. Since the river is the border between Jordan and Israel/Palestine, Israel has always been invested in controlling the area under the guise of security. Shehadeh describes the area around the river as "heavily guarded" with mines all around the river. That is why when the Oslo accord was signed, the Jordan valley was designated as a C area, meaning it is a Palestinian territory but is still subject to Israeli security and administrative laws. What that translates to is that not only does Israel maintain a security presence there, but they also decide on whether to give Palestinian permits to build there. Since permits are rarely granted, Palestinian farming communities are unable to construct homes or any permanent buildings there and demolitions of Palestinian homes are a regular occurrence. By ensuring that Palestinians need permits to establish any structure there, Israel makes sure that the Palestinian population within the valley cannot grow or thrive. Israel also does this through denying Palestinians access to their land. Shehadeh reflects on the land cases he had to argue with Israeli officials in his capacity as a lawyer. Under the pretext of security, he claims, Israel denies Palestinian farmers access to land they own;

⁶⁰ One of the only ecocritical work on hydropolitics in Palestinian Literature is Hannah Boast's "A River without Water"

⁶¹ This is featured in reports produced by EWASH as well as Graham, 2010.

For the past forty- two years Israel has been preventing some 2,000 Palestinians who have left the Jordan valley from returning to the area under the family reunification scheme, even for short visits, in an effort to keep them from again demanding their land back, citing security concerns. Thousands of dunums of Palestinian land have been illegally transferred to settlements and army bases in the area. (63)

Not only are Palestinians denied access to their lands then, but they are also dispossessed of their lands as part of a larger settler project. Shehadeh ties this dispossession to Israel's access to cheap labour. Not only do these settlements end up employing cheap Thai labor, they also force these Palestinian farmers through this act of denial to become cheap labor for them since they are unable to work their own land. The settlements that illegally seized their lands become a space in which Palestinian farmers are consigned to labor in order to maintain a living in the region in which they reside. This process of transforming them into cheap labor not only happens through dispossessing them of their land, but also through hydropolitics. This manifests through denying Palestinian farmers access to water in order to farm their lands. "The Palestinian farmers who somehow manage to keep their land" in the Jordan valley, Shehadeh says, "face discrimination in the allocation of water and have no easy access to markets to sell their crops" (63). The presence of Palestinians within the Jordan valley is therefore controlled by a settler colonial apparatus that consigns them to displacement or cheap labor.

On an even larger regional scale, the River Jordan is a key site of hydropolitical tension between Israel, Palestine, Lebanon, Jordan and Syria. Its waters are subject to fierce contestation as access to the river's water is highly unequal. Most of the river's water is diverted by Mekorot Israel's National Water Carrier and distributed to its urban area and the

Negev in the south which is known to be arid. One of the key problems that the Zionist project in Palestine has had since its inception was the water scarcity in the area. Early Zionist thinkers felt that the water at its current levels would not be able to sustain Jewish immigrants amassing in the area and this would therefore hinder the establishment of a Jewish homeland in Palestine. Early ideas on how to resolve this issue appeared in the 1902 book *Altneuland* by Theodore Herzl in which he discussed utilizing the sources of the Jordan River for irrigation purposes and constructing a canal which ran parallel to the Jordan River and the Dead Sea (Kantor). A well-known plan for water economy that the Israeli state utilized later on is included in the book by Professor Walter Clay Lowdermilk, *Palestine, Land of Promise*, published in 1944 (Kantor). Lowdermilk, a U.S. soil conservationist, was invited to Palestine by the British Mandatory Government to conduct a survey for airports (Kantor). He utilized his time in Palestine to also conduct a survey for a water development project in Palestine which later became known as the "Lowdermilk plan" (Kantor). His book also served as the basis for the detailed water resource plan prepared by James Hayes, an engineer from the Tennessee Valley Authority of the U.S., at the invitation of the settlement institutes in Israel (Kantor). In the late 1930s and mid 1940s, Transjordan and the Zionist Organization commissioned mutually exclusive, competing water resource development studies (Haddadin 237). The Transjordanian study, concluded that the naturally available water resources were not sufficient to sustain a Jewish homeland. The Zionist's study, by Clay Lowdermilk concluded the same however it also noted that by diverting water from the Jordan River basin to the Negev for support of agricultural and residential development there, a Jewish state with 4 million new immigrants would be sustainable (Haddadin 237). Plans for the Israeli National Water Carrier therefore were made before the establishment of the state of Israel but the construction of the project, originally known as the Jordan Valley Unified Water Plan didn't start till after 1948. The project was constructed by Mekorot and although

it was started during the tenure of Israeli Prime Minister David Ben-Gurion, it was completed in 1964 by Prime Minister Levi Eshkol (Kantor). This was of course after the Degania Dam built in the 1930's before the creation of Israel, which had already completely changed the Jordan river and all that it had nurtured before. As a result of this plan long having already been part of Israel's infrastructure, when Syria and Jordan decided to divert some of the Jordan River headwaters (both the Hasbani and the Banias) to the Yarmouk River in the mid 60s this led to border clashes as Israel regarded this act of diversion as an infringement on its sovereign rights (Murakami 289). Control of water resources and Israeli military attacks against the diversion effort are considered among the factors which led to the Six-Day War in June 1967. It is also attributed to Israel's decision to take over the Golan Heights in Syria in order to stop future attempts at diverting the water which it still occupies to this day. To Shehadeh, the river and the border it has come to embody, function in multiple ways as a reminder of necropower and Palestinian dispossession. It is both a reminder of 1967 when Palestinians became twice refugees and of the Israeli states control over water and therefore control over Palestinian lives. This control of water in the Jordan valley, has had an effect on the ability of Palestinian farmers and communities to live in the Jordan Valley. A report by B'Tselem, an Israeli Human Rights organization, showcases Israeli practices in the Jordan Valley that ensures its uninhabitability by Palestinians and therefore makes it easier for Israel to annex it. The valley, B'Tselem points out, constitutes almost 30% of the West Bank. Nearly 65,000 Palestinians and some 11,000 settlers live there, and Israel has taken over most of the land in order to de facto annex it. In order to do so, Israel employs a number of tactics and has established infrastructure that minimize Palestinian presence there; barring Palestinians from using 85% of the land, restricting their access to water resources and keeping them from building homes (B'Tselem). Israeli authorities are also taking measures to

drive out over 50 Palestinian communities across the Jordan Valley, by making their lives intolerable. One way of doing this is denying them access to water;

These communities rely on the scant rainfall in the area, which they collect in cisterns and supplement by purchasing water from private vendors who transport water in tankers...The residents of these communities use only about 20 liters of water per person a day overall, for all needs. This falls far short of the 100 liters per person per day that is the minimum recommended by the World Health Organization. (B'Tselem)

Moreover, B'Tselem points to the Israeli authorities including the military and the Israel Nature and Parks Authority's harassment of Palestinian residents in the area by confiscating tankers used to transport water, pipelines carrying water from springs, tractors and other farming equipment, and solar panels. In comparison, Israeli settlements in the same area are allowed to use 40% of the annual renewable water from a mountain aquifer. "The Jewish population," Shehadeh points out, "is less than 5000⁶² but their consumption of water is equivalent to 75% of the water consumption of the entire Palestinian population in the West Bank" (63). The footprint of Israeli farming methods that consume huge amounts of water is also not lost on Shehadeh as he even points to the fact that some Israeli farms in the valley specialize in "raising equatorial fish in an area where water is so precious" (64). Shehadeh also through his reading of his uncle's account of his journey to Jordan, Syria and Lebanon depicts a flourishing environment in Palestine's past, therefore challenging Zionist narratives of having made "the desert bloom." Employing a sarcastic tone, Shehadeh, in his account of a visit to the Huleh Lake which was drained by the Jewish National Fund in the early 1950s

⁶² The discrepancy between Shehadeh's account of the Jewish population in the Jordan valley and B'Tselem's account is due to the difference in the time of writing. Shehadeh's book was published in 2010.

and is now known as the Huleh Nature Reserve, describes a Nature reserve that at once both glorifies Israeli engineering ingenuity in draining the lake, while at the same time laments the environmental disaster this has caused. In a scene that is somewhat dystopic he describes an exhibition in the visitor's center with stuffed animals and birds that inhabited the marsh and were all extinct now. He also cynically describes the film about the lake in the center "that tries to comfort the viewer by saying that what Israel did in the early 1950s would have happened anyway several hundreds of thousands of years later" (128). Shehadeh more than implies here that Israeli alterations of the landscape have caused an environmental crisis even as the nature reserve tries to put a spin on it and frame its own narrative. By retracing his uncle's footsteps, he attempts to imagine the landscape as it was in the past before Israeli settler colonialism and in the process implies a history of superior Palestinian environmental stewardship that had less of a footprint on the fragile ecology of the region. More importantly however, *A Rift in Time* suggests that the creation of new geographies is not just the sign of settler colonial domination, but also an index to the agency of land, water and climate, and to the radical impermanence of these new exploitative geographies.

Chapter 3:

Toxic Waste: Necropower and Sacrifice Zones

“Whatever was coming would not necessarily appear right away; it might not arrive for twenty or even a hundred years. Because these old ones paid no attention to white man’s time. But sterling had never dreamed that one day his own life would be changed forever because of that mine... That mine had destroyed Sterling’s life without Sterling ever setting foot near the acres of ruined earth at the open pit.”- Leslie Mormon Silko, *Almanac of the Dead* 35.

In 1982, residents of Warren county in North Carolina protested the construction of a chemical-waste landfill near Afton where several hundred thousand tons of soil tainted with PCB would be buried. The way in which this soil had come to be contaminated is a story in and of itself that involved the collusion of two businessmen to get rid of hazardous waste by spraying thousands of gallons of PCB tainted fluid alongside roads in “remote” areas. When this was discovered the state considered several plans before ultimately deciding on burying the soil in a landfill. As a result, the state evaluated 90 sites before settling on a site within Warren County. The landfill site was located in a rural and agricultural area where a predominantly black community lived. When questioned about the siting of this landfill, the state argued that most of the 90 sites they had considered had been ruled out because they did not meet two EPA criteria; the bottom of the landfill should be at least 50 feet above ground water level and the site should have thick and relatively impermeable soil formations. Yet when state officials met with the EPA and residents at a public hearing in 1979, they requested that the EPA waive three of its regulations. Two of those regulations were the requirement that groundwater be at least 50ft below the landfill bottom, and the need for a liner since they argued that the soil compaction was sufficient. Further study of the location showed through a soil analysis that the soil compaction in fact was not enough and moreover the ground water was actually seven feet below the surface of the chosen site. Despite opposition to the landfill, the governor of North Carolina at that time and the EPA approved the site and framed the landfill as integral to the “public good” and declared that it would be

the “Cadillac of landfills.” What followed was a string of lawsuits including one filed by the NAACP that explicitly linked race with exposure to environmental hazards. The NAACP argued that the reason behind the choice of the location of the landfill was the fact that the community was predominantly black, rural and poor. Their arguments pointed out that Warren County had the highest percentage of minorities among all the counties in the state, and that the state had ignored several alternative suitable or superior sites in other locations in North Carolina that had lower percentages of minorities. The lawsuits to stop the dumping of the PCB contaminated soil all failed, with a court in 1981 striking down a Warren County ordinance banning the disposal of PCB within its limits by arguing that states or local jurisdictions could not stymie “the national goal of properly disposing of hazardous chemical substances” and that it would be problematic if states refused “to share in the national responsibility for finding safe means for the proper disposal of hazardous substances” (Warren County v North Carolina, 1981). One of the outcomes of the Warren County protests however, was that activists and protesters including congressman Walter Fauntroy began investigating the NAACP’s claim that the site had been selected based on the socioeconomic make up of Warren County rather than its geological makeup. Two studies were commissioned; one focusing on south-eastern United states and the other a more national study carried out by a United Church of Christ (UCC) church commission for racial justice. As Dorceta E. Taylor states in her book, *Toxic Communities*, these two studies are the earliest studies to link race with the location of toxic waste sites. The UCC commission study for example found that three of the five largest hazardous waste landfills in the U.S were located in predominantly Black or Hispanic communities. Further studies since then have corroborated the UCC commissions finding despite denial by government officials and

attempts to discredit studies that argue for the disproportionate siting and discriminate thesis⁶³.

Toxic waste disposal sites:

In the United states there is evidence, that as early as the 1600s, industries that were relocated from Lower Manhattan as a result of environmental pollution were relocated to the fringes of black neighbourhoods⁶⁴. Furthermore, environmental justice activists continuously cite Native American communities as victims of both resource extraction of hazardous materials as well as the processing of these hazardous materials. According to Worldwatch Institute, 317 reservations are threatened by hazardous waste and in recent years hundreds of proposals have been made to dump toxic waste on Native American land. This would only add to the more than half a century of exposure that Native Americans have already had to toxic waste; ever since nuclear and chemical warfare came to be. According to Dorceta Taylor, in energy production cycles, corporations concentrate hazardous elements of their industry on or near Indian land. These corporations, she argues, extract resources and convert it to wealth, while “Indians labor in unsafe conditions, live in poverty and inherit perilous wastes” (54). Studies have focused on the fact that these communities are targeted because they have high unemployment, low wages and are located in areas that are rich in resources. These studies focus on the economic reason behind choosing these areas as toxic waste disposal sites however what this chapter aims to do is to show that these economic motivations are tied up with a more complex issue; that the siting of these hazardous facilities is tied up with the necropolitics of settler colonialism. This chapter will take up the term

⁶³ Dorceta E. Taylor states that the disproportionate siting and discrimination thesis argues that hazardous facilities are disproportionately located in minority and low-income areas and that these patterns are a result of discrimination.

⁶⁴ Dorceta E. Taylor’s scholarship among others extensively documents this.

“sacrifice zones”⁶⁵ in the sense that what is deemed “sacrifice” in the settler colonial apparatus is not just spaces that are “out of sight, out of mind,” but also people “who are out of sight, out of mind.” Racialized and marginalized communities in the U.S. therefore are deemed as sacrificial through settler colonialisms decree over who lives and who dies. Taylor posits for example that Native American reservations rank lowest on environmental protection and policy indices and therefore are attractive sites for hosting noxious facilities. She gives the example of Skull Valley Goshute Reservation in Utah which has been described as a national sacrifice zone. The reservation has several military facilities that conducted “open-air nerve agent tests, chemical and biological weapon tests, and hazardous materials are stored and incinerated at these facilities” (54). Kamala Platt refers to this in “Ecocritical Chicana Literature,” as racial discrimination in environmental policy making. She points to the racial discrimination in the enforcement of environmental regulations and laws and the deliberate targeting of communities of colour for toxic waste disposal. She states:

It is racial discrimination in the official sanctioning of the life-threatening presence of poisons and pollutants in communities of colour. And it is racial discrimination in the history of excluding people of colour from the mainstream environmental groups, decision making boards, commissions, and regulatory bodies” (69).

Dorceta Taylor in reference specifically to Indigenous communities in the U.S. refers to this using Robert Blauner’s term “internal colonialism” rather than “racial discrimination,” whereby the U.S. seeks to bring their “hinterlands and peripheral regions” under the control of “the core” (48). Rather than dealing with this issue as an “internal colonialism” issue

⁶⁵ The term sacrifice zones comes from “National sacrifice zones” coined by governments to designate areas that are contaminated by hazardous materials. Case studies about sacrifice zones can be read in Steve Lerner’s 2010 book *Sacrifice Zones: The Front Lines of Toxic Chemical Exposure in The United States*.

however, this chapter argues that the choice to locate toxic waste management sites near or in minority communities in the U.S. is a result of ongoing settler colonialism and in general is part of a settler colonial apparatus. The term “Internal colonialism” was originally embraced by black and chicanx scholars in the 60s as a model of analysis and a theory of race in the U.S. By attributing colonization to the continued subordination of black and chicanx bodies in the U.S., internal colonialism was used as a way to frame blacks and chicanx in the U.S. who suffer from racism as colonial subjects. The term was popular in the 60s and 70s, but by the 1980s this theory had been abandoned in favour of other ideas (Gutiérrez 281). Thinking through a settler colonial framework on the other hand acknowledges that settler colonialism is an ongoing system of power that involves the genocide and oppression of indigenous peoples. Settler colonialism normalizes continuous settler occupation and land exploitation. Settler Colonial Studies evolved from scholarship in Indigenous Studies⁶⁶ that critiqued the inadequacy of postcolonial studies in explaining the repression of Indigenous peoples around the world. More recent attempts to revitalize the term Internal colonialism similarly seem to have been revolved around the same critique of post-colonialism with a call for the continued use of the term in order to understand “the oppression of African Americans living in US ghettos” (Pinderhughes 2). Although attention to internal colonialism and settler colonialism is a result of critiques of both indigenous studies and black studies to the “post” in “postcolonial” as inadequate for understanding ongoing systems of dominations in places such as the U.S., Canada, Australia and Israel where colonialism is not in the past and where settlers have come to stay. The framework of settler colonialism is more comprehensive and inclusive than “internal colonialism,” though both have important uses. The crux of the argument in this chapter after all is that the disproportionate siting of toxic waste disposal

⁶⁶ Patrick Wolfe and Lorenzo Veracini who both are attributed for giving rise to the field both wrote about indigenous issues in the Australian context before turning some of their attention to the Israeli context.

sites near marginalized communities is not unique to the U.S. and has long been part of a global settler colonial infrastructure.

In the Palestinian context for example, waste management in general is a source of conflict. While in the U.S. we can say that toxic waste disposal sites are actually constructed and inequitably located near low income and minority communities, in the case of Israel and Palestine, it is not just toxic waste, but the construction of waste disposal facilities in general, including waste water facilities, which are routinely built on Palestinian land and thus become sites of political contestations that are in themselves rife with complications. There is evidence that some waste from Israeli settlements rather than being dealt with by Israeli waste management facilities are instead either dumped in landfills close to Palestinian towns such as Ezariyah⁶⁷ or thrown into valleys close to Palestinian villages. On a recent visit to the West Bank for example, I personally witnessed this at the base of Ariel West settlement (named after Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon). Around the base of the settlement which sits on a hilltop and all the way down to Al-Matwa valley, passers-by can see the garbage dumped in the direction of a Palestinian village in the valley as well as smell the waste-water that is overflowing from the settlement. This brings to mind Eyal Weizman's analysis of the vertical axis of domination in Palestine⁶⁸. In this sense, the fact that settlements are often built on hilltops above Palestinian land is utilized also so that gravity can be put to work, sending pollutants down onto Palestinian villages. In addition to these waste-water and garbage sites, Palestinian lands are also often used as dumps and landfills for toxic waste from Israeli settlements and industrial areas. In the case of Israel, rather than dealing with internal objections over toxic waste disposal sites, it uses its status as the occupying power to impose waste treatment facilities and landfills on Palestinian communities. In order to do this, Israel

⁶⁷ Ezariyah is a Palestinian town close to Maale Edumim settlement and Jerusalem.

⁶⁸ Which I refer to in chapter two.

frames the areas in which these communities live in as “sacrifice zones;” areas that are irrevocably impaired by environmental and economic neglect (Aloni 5). There are 15 waste plants on such zones. Six of these sites handle toxic waste that typically require special regulations due to the environmental danger they pose (Aloni 5). To further complicate matters, Palestinian lands have been confiscated by Israel in order to construct these waste disposal sites⁶⁹.

In *This Changes Everything: Capitalism vs. the Climate*, Naomi Klein discusses the concept of a “sacrifice zone” writing, “Running an economy on energy sources that release poisons as an unavoidable part of their extraction and refining has always required sacrifice zones—whole subsets of humanity categorized as less than fully human, which made their poisoning in the name of progress somehow acceptable.” As mentioned earlier, this chapter seeks to explore the relationship between these “sacrifice zones” and the people who dwell within it. Despite Klein’s slippage between sacrifice zones and population, what her account shows us is that these “zones” are not empty contrary to what the phrase implies and by framing these areas as “sacrifice zones” the people who are consigned to live there are categorized as less than fully human by virtue of their habitation within a designated “wasteland.” The idea of sacrifice zones and the categorization of a subset of humans as less than fully human is at the heart of what this chapter seeks to discuss through a close reading of Ana Castillo’s *So Far from God* and Inas Halabi’s short story *Near the Caves Lies a Peach Orchard*. These two narratives show the way in which racialized communities see the disposal of toxic waste in their communities as part of a larger project to immiserate, displace

⁶⁹ In 2015, Israel announced the seizure of 125 acres of private Palestinian land near East Jerusalem in order to construct a facility for construction waste. As a result, 120 Bedouins were evicted. In 2017, a report by the Israeli Human Rights organization B’tselem stated that “Israel’s environmental policy in the West Bank, including the siting of polluting waste treatment facilities there, is part and parcel of the policy of dispossession and annexation it has practiced in the West Bank for the past 50 years.”

and dispossess them. I argue that in the settler colonial context, necropower is implicated in the decision that a settler colonial power makes when locating these toxic disposal sites.

In this chapter, I also seek to offer an intervention to the recent discussions around ecomodernism⁷⁰ as a solution to our growing environmental problems in addition to discussions within the environmental humanities around “toxic wilderness” areas. Places like Chernobyl or the Hanford Nuclear Reservation (currently managed by the National Park Service) are being framed as possible sites of ecological reclamation and conservation or as examples of synthetic wilderness and “nature” uncontainable by the nation state. These kinds of frameworks can be seen in the recent analyses of the works in speculative fictions such as Gordan Douglas’s science fiction film *Them!*⁷¹ as well as Jeff Vindameer’s novel *Borne* and his *Southern Reach Trilogy*. These discussions around toxic wilderness assume a form of ecological resilience devoid of human control. This ecological resilience is read either through signs of ecological growth in nuclear wastelands or through various forms of genetic mutation. I argue that this assumption is problematic in that even if nature is resilient, humans who reside in these spaces are not. These discussions therefore reiterate and further the human/nature divide that privileges a “nature” or “wilderness” devoid of humans. Some of the recurring questions that motivate this chapter include thinking through the ways in which toxic disposal sites are a specific site of settler colonial infrastructure. How can the redefining of sacrifice zones as sites with “undesirable” population zones rather than empty zones on the periphery, help us rethink the relationship between necropower and settler colonialism? What can the parallels between invisible toxic contamination and invisible bodies teach us about the disposability of black and brown bodies? What can be gained from bringing into

⁷⁰ This is a term that arose out scholarship by Eric Benton and Peter Fine as well as authors like Stewart Brand. Ecomodernism is a philosophy that believes technology can be used to mitigate the anthropogenic impacts on the environment.

⁷¹ Joseph Masco has an excellent analysis of the film in “Mutant Ecologies: Radioactive life in post-Cold War New Mexico” where he states that *Them!* argues that the proliferation of nuclear materials in the environment is a source of a new kind of nature “mutant, wild and uncontainable by the state”(228).

comparison contamination in the U.S with contamination in Israel? And in what ways do narratives like Ana Castillo's and Inas Halabi's reflect on the slow violence⁷² of toxic contamination and the representation problem it creates?

Toxic waste and the problem with Ecomodernism:

In 2016 in an effort to ensure that Diablo Canyon Nuclear Power Plant in California is not shut down in 2024, ecomodernists such as *Whole Earth Catalog* founder Stewart Brand, climate scientists James Hansen of Columbia University and Kerry Emanuel of MIT, and the Harvard psychologist Steven Pinker sent a letter to Gov. Jerry Brown (D); the CEO of Pacific Gas & Electric, the utility that owns the plant; and five state regulatory officials warning them that “closing Diablo Canyon would make it far harder to meet the state’s climate goals.” James Hansen who is the world’s leading climate scientist since he first warned U.S. Congress about global warming in 1988, has asserted the potential of nuclear energy to be part of the solution to climate change, a point he and fellow scientists some of whom have published a Manifesto titled “An Ecomodernist Manifesto” have affirmed over the past few years. In an Op-ed in the guardian in 2015, Hansen and others wrote “Nuclear power paves the only viable path forward on climate change.” That same year, 18 scholars co-authored the Ecomodernist Manifesto which called for the intensifications of “Urbanization, agricultural intensification, nuclear power, aquaculture, and desalination” in order to solve climate change (18). These scholars argue that while they affirm a long standing environmental ideal, humanity must shrink its impact on the environment in order to make room for nature, they reject another ideal, namely that human societies must harmonize with nature in order to avoid ecological collapse (6). They argue that these two ideals cannot be reconciled and therefore they call for a “decoupling” of human development from

⁷² Rob Nixon coins “Slow Violence” as a violence that occurs gradually and out of sight and is dispersed across time and space.

environmental impacts by intensifying human activities such as settlement, farming and energy extraction through technological processes or geoengineering that have the potential to reduce human demands on the environment, allowing more room for non-human species. In their view, our current agricultural practices and energy extraction is inefficient. “Suburbanization, low-yield farming, and many forms of renewable energy production, in contrast, generally require more land and resources and leave less room for nature” (18). Therefore, Ecomodernists call for and support the establishment of nuclear energy sites while ignoring the fact that in order to establish these nuclear plants, governments locate them in sacrifice zones that often come at the expense of low-income minorities. They also ignore the violence and erasure that the nuclear project has had on people especially Indigenous peoples around the world. Instead, they declare in the Manifesto that,

Violence in all forms has declined significantly and is probably at the lowest per capita level ever experienced by the human species, the horrors of the 20th century and present-day terrorism notwithstanding. Globally, human beings have moved from autocratic government toward liberal democracy characterized by the rule of law and increased freedom. Personal, economic, and political liberties have spread worldwide and are today largely accepted as universal values. (8)

There is no mention in the manifesto of sacrifice zones or that nuclear waste lands are often sites of land dispossession. In fact, one of the first acts of the Manhattan Project was the dispossession of Native American tribes of their lands in order to clear the way for a “national security” project. The Hanford reservation which is currently managed by the National Parks Service is a representative of this dispossession. Therefore, as Joseph Masco in his book *Nuclear Borderlands* warns us, these debates about what he calls “nuclear nature” articulate new forms of state territoriality. Masco points to the thousands of acres of

contaminated land that the Department of Energy (DOE) in the U.S. has turned into some of the most heavily fortified wildlife preserves

By presenting these sites as untouched in over fifty years, the DOE seeks to redefine the value and object of that military fortification, replacing nuclear weapons systems with biodiversity as the security object of the nuclear state. This suturing together of wildlife preserve and national sacrifice zone has become an expansive post–Cold War project. (313)

These new wildlife preserves are framed as benefitting from isolation from humans because “human contact is more immediately toxic for many ecosystems than are radioactive materials” (314). Scholars cite the Chernobyl exclusion zone which covers an area in both Ukraine and Belarus as an example of this. They cite the increase of endangered animal populations such as brown bears, bison, wolves, lynx, Przewalski horses and more than 200 bird species as evidence of “nature” thriving in places with little human impact. In an article titled “Chernobyl: The Wildlife Haven Created When People Left,” journalist Tom Allan reflects on debates around “the positive and negative effects” of Chernobyl 33 years later. “The long-term impact of the radiation on animal populations is a subject of intense debate” he says “because scientists have struggled to untangle the positive effects of human absence from the negative effects of living in a poisoned environment” and that through Chernobyl we can see “a flash forward to a world without people.” The fact that one can talk about “negative” and “positive” effects of a nuclear disaster is in and of itself problematic and ignores both the persistent human impact of toxic waste as well as the visible and invisible ecological devastation. As Masco points out, the DOE “wildlife reserve/sacrifice zone dual structure” contends that toxic waste “can be kept in place and that the border between preserve and wasteland can be effectively patrolled over millennia” (314). Today one can take an “eco-tour” of these contaminated places. Examples of these include tours of the

Hanford Reservation administered by the National Parks Service which includes a tour of Reactor B, or an eco-tour of the Palieski State Radioecological Reserve in Belarus which is currently the largest nature reserve in Europe. This logic, Masco points out, is trumped by the environmental hazards that species within these contaminated spaces pose to uncontaminated ecologies since containing these species within the borders of a geographical area is virtually impossible. While scientists and the media for example celebrate the increase of wildlife in these contaminated spaces, some caution that it is too soon to know the full effects of radiation on our ecology because there have not been enough generations of breeding. They point to the worrying effect of toxicity on small organisms within these environments that foretell further ecological devastation rather than regeneration. They point to decomposition which is a natural part of any organism's life cycle and yet has halted in these nuclear landscapes. An example that is given of this is "the Red Forest," a pine forest that surrounded Chernobyl reactor that turned from green to red in the aftermath of the explosion. Usually these trees would have decomposed and yet they never did, which prompted authorities to cut them down and dump them in nearby pits for fear of wildfires turning them into ash that would then spread outside the borders of this "Radioecological Reserve." This also is seen in Hanford where Russian thistle with deep roots feeds on toxic waste and has created a problem when they break off and are swept out of the borders of the Hanford Reservation. As Masco points out, the U.S. government spends millions each year managing this form of contamination by hiring "crews armed with pitchforks patrolling the reservation in trucks to wrangle the radioactive weeds" (315). These radioactive tumbleweeds, Masco warns, are new forms of nuclear nature and one must be wary of the rhetoric that frames these contaminated spaces as sites of purity because it has involved state sponsored territorial sacrifice and "the U.S. nuclear complex could not have produced seventy thousand nuclear weapons from 1943 to 1992 without favouring industrial production over environmental concerns"(315).

Moreover, these state-sponsored greening narratives contradict earlier narratives around uranium extraction and the toxic contamination of the Navajo nation. In these earlier narratives, uranium extraction, nuclear testing as well as the disposal of toxic waste on Navajo nation land was explained away as inconsequential since the affected areas were wastelands. These desert regions and their inhabitants were viewed as peripheral zones and economically unproductive by industrial and governmental officials (Kuletz 242). Deserts in the U.S. have therefore become the largest militarised landscapes through a narrative that frame desert ecologies as inferior to green ecologies, devoid of any forms of life even though deserts are rich ecologies with enormous biodiversity and have historically been inhabited by different indigenous communities.

Toxic disposal sites as infrastructure:

If we are to consider Stephan Graham's framework that energy, water, sewage, transport, trade, finance, and communication infrastructures allow modern life to exist, then waste management sites and more specifically toxic waste disposal sites are an important infrastructure for urban spaces. Without them waste accumulates within cities and therefore the disposal of waste, especially toxic waste, has traditionally been a problem that states have resolved by taking the problem out of urban spaces to what is perceived as the "periphery." The term "periphery" is often used to signal geographical remoteness rather than social marginalization however I take up this term in this chapter a little differently. I not only utilize it to signal a remote physical space but also to signal socially peripheral spaces. As the case of Israeli settlers dumping of waste from hilltops in the West Bank demonstrates, the improper disposal of waste does not only happen in removed spaces. With the rise of urbanisation, the problem of how and where to dispose of waste will only continue to grow and marginalized communities deemed at the "periphery" will bear the toll of this the most.

As Graham points out, well over fifty percent of the world's population currently live in cities and it is projected that by 2050, seventy five percent of the world population will live in cities, and therefore the importance of infrastructures that make urban life possible will only continue to grow. As Graham posits, infrastructural edifices proved the "fundamental background to modern urban every-day life," one that is "hidden, assumed and naturalized." Toxic waste disposal sites in particular are very much in the "background" and are generally "hidden," their existence taken for granted. They are taken for granted in the sense that rarely do we think of the consequence of using batteries for example in our everyday life and the way both the manufacturing and disposal of this everyday commodity has material consequences for communities that are on the "periphery." This is especially problematic when we consider that in a settler colonial context, the periphery is generally where indigenous and/or minority communities reside, and these areas become sacrifice zones. The dumping of nuclear waste for example on or near impoverished communities in the U.S. has been made easier through the framing of these spaces as "wasteland" and contributes to the discursive formation of what Valerie Kuletz, Danielle Endres and others have called "nuclear colonialism"(39).⁷³ As Kuletz suggests, nuclear testing programs brought into being a variety of landscapes in the U.S. that were sacrificed in the interest of "National Security" (239). Two landscapes used for both testing and disposal of hazardous nuclear waste are in Washington⁷⁴ and Nevada⁷⁵. Kuletz in fact argues that all the sites where nuclear testing occurred in the U.S were originally inhabited or used by indigenous people⁷⁶. These toxic landscapes Valerie Kuletz suggests are examples of environmental violence, an

⁷³ See "Nuclear Colonialism" in Valerie Kuletz's 2001 essay, "Invisible Spaces, Violent Places" and Danielle Endres's 2009 article, "The Rhetoric of Nuclear Colonialism: Rhetorical Exclusion of American Indian Arguments in the Yucca Mountain Nuclear Waste Siting Decision"

⁷⁴ Hanford Reservation

⁷⁵ Yucca Mountain

⁷⁶ This does not mean that non indigenous communities are not subjected to radioactive waste however, indigenous peoples experience the production, processing and waste storage of nuclear testing more than any group.

environmental violence that is extreme yet strangely invisible to most people (241). As she states, the Department of Defence and the Department of Energy who sustain these landscapes of violence “ensure their power by maintaining a low public profile “(242). These landscapes that function both to produce and dispose of toxic waste are therefore a form of the invisible infrastructure that Graham refers to. As Kuletz further suggests those caught in the “web of power” that is this infrastructure see and experience the violence done to these landscapes but are unable to make them visible to others since they themselves are invisible (242). Toxicity not only invades the landscape around them but also invades their bodies. Ecomodernist’s call for geoengineering and continued use of nuclear power plants depends precisely on the invisibility of the communities affected by nuclear waste as well as the invisibility of toxic contamination. There is no discussion for example within the Ecomodernist Manifesto about the continued consequences of uranium extraction around the world or the consequences of the disposal of nuclear waste. As such, this chapter suggests the importance of framing sacrifice zones as part and parcel of a settler colonial infrastructure that relegates certain bodies as disposable. Kuletz quoting Grace Thorpe a tribal judge and health commissioner for the Sauk and Fox nation in Oklahoma states that radioactive waste is a form of genocide to her people because of the “harm it can do to the genes and the reproduction of [their] people” (240).

Sacrifice Zones: A Close Reading of *So Far from God*

Ana Castillo’s 1993 novel *So Far from God* parallels the immiseration of an entire community in New Mexico with the decline and eventual death of a Chicana woman as a result of toxic waste contamination. In the novel the slow violence of toxic contamination manifests itself through the ruined body of Fe one of the novel’s central characters as well as multigenerational violence on her community as a whole. Castillo a Chicana novelist, essayist and scholar is considered one of the leading voices in Chicana Literature whose work

centres around issues of identity, race and class. *So Far from God*, which borrows elements of magical realism centers around the story of a family in a small community in Tome, New Mexico. In order to understand the broader context in which this novel is situated, it is important to reflect on the border between the United States and Mexico which is a site of various labor and economic agreements in addition to immigration. In 1965, the Manufacturing and Export Services Industry (IMMEX) also known as the Maquiladora Program was established in Mexico with the aim of attracting foreign investment and boosting Mexico's economy, especially along the U.S. border. The program is jointly administered by Mexico and the U.S. and it offers foreign manufacturers tax incentives to invest in factories along the border. In 1994, the United States, Mexico, and Canada also signed the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA). As a result, assembly plants sprung up on the Mexican side of the border, "with the original proviso that the manufactured goods would be sent to the United States as well as the waste products. This provision has not been honoured and toxic waste products have stayed in Mexico" (Herrera-Sobek 183). The U.S. Mexico border is also host to a number of toxic waste sites and nuclear projects. This has contributed to the pollution of the US-Mexico border. New Mexico for instance hosts the Los Alamos National Laboratory close to Santa Fe where the two atomic bombs that were used on Hiroshima and Nagasaki were manufactured. The desert in central New Mexico is where the first atomic bomb was detonated in 1945. In terms of land control or government, the historical background pertaining to Castillo's novel is described aptly in *So Far from God* by a character named La Rita of Belen, "First the gringos took most of our land away when they took over the territory from Mexico— right after Mexico had taken it from Spain and like my vis-abuelo used to say, 'Ni no' habiamo' dado cuenta,' it all happened so fast!" (217).

In the novel, Castillo renames the state of New Mexico from "The Land of Enchantment" in which the abuelos and vis-abuelos thought life was hard but had its rewards, to the "The Land of Entrapment" as a result of toxic contamination (172). The novel ties the devastation of an entire community with environmental devastation as a result of a fictional chemical waste company called Acme International. Castillo's *So Far from God* contains an apocalyptic description of the land, with plants withering, dying animals and birds falling dead from the sky. Through this scene and the death of Fe, one of the characters in the novel, Castillo cautions against factories like Acme International and the impact of toxic pollution on people's health and livelihoods in New Mexico. Acme International and the U.S. government through its contract with them therefore contribute to the slow violence that the community suffers from. In the novel, Acme International subcontracts jobs from larger companies that had direct contracts with the Pentagon creating a shroud that makes it hard to hold the government accountable for the decline of the community. Furthermore, the novel connects the slow violence in the U.S with that abroad as the job Acme International is contracted to do is a clean-up of parts of high-tech weapons with undisclosed chemicals. People in the New Mexico community that the novel centres around did not understand what was slowly killing them and their environment or if they did, did not know what to do about it. *So Far from God* specifically tells the story of a matriarch Sofia, and her four daughters Esperanza, Fe, Caridad and La Loca. In the background is a Chicana/o agricultural community struggling to survive in the face of large corporate agrobusinesses. As a result, Sofia decides to run for mayor of Tome and embarks on a sheep-grazing and wool-weaving cooperative that she names "Los Ganados y Lana arrive" with her "comadres" that also sells hormone-free meat and organic vegetables, thus producing healthy food and generating sustainable jobs for the community and the environment. This inspires other members of the community to address other problems such as education and drug abuse. Sofia and her

community attempt to establish a socially, economically, and environmentally sound community, which stands in contrast with the toxic violence that is also transpiring in the novel. It is hard to reconcile the image of an organic and sustainable cooperative with the image of a toxic environment where the ecology is dying. In this sense, the novel seems to relegate Fe and the slow violence she and her community is subjected to, to the background maybe in an attempt to show the insidiousness of toxic contamination. As a result, a sense of doom slowly permeates the novel before finally ending with the death of Fe from cancer and La Loca from undisclosed and unknown reasons.

The slow violence of toxic contamination mostly therefore appears in chapter eleven, which tells of Fe's work at Acme International. The chapter reflects on both what should have been the fulfillment of Fe's dreams and the end of her life. It starts with describing Fe's wedding and her desire for children and reflects instead on her withering body as a result of chemical waste. Fe, the novel reflects, in her determination to achieve "the American dream" (something she feels her family failed to achieve), inadvertently accelerates the destruction of her body. After being passed over for promotions from a bank she worked at as a result of a speech "handicap" she quits her job and accepts a high paying if "shit" job in order to "buy her house, make car payments, have a baby, in other words, have a life like people do on T.V." (189). In reality she is trying to attain middle-class stability by handling highly toxic products without being given proper instructions or being informed of the risks involved. As a result, her entire body is damaged, beginning with nausea and headaches, then a miscarriage, and finally a cancer that consumes her from the inside. The novel suggests that other women in her workplace suffer from similar problems, but Fe's decline is accelerated because she takes on every gritty job she is given out of her desire to "move up quick" (178). Fe, describing the demographics of the women who held jobs at Acme, declares that she got promoted after a few months because some of the women did not have high school diplomas

and that several spoke “Spanish, Tewa, Tiwa ,or some other Pueblo dialect as their first language and that none had the experience of being a “white-collar” worker before (179). Through this description, the novel comments on the vulnerability of the women who find themselves with these kinds of jobs. The medical services at the factory refuse to acknowledge the toxicity that these women are subjected to and the toxic violence that is damaging their reproductive capabilities and endangering their lives. Instead, the medical services attribute their problems to "just about being a woman" and give them “advice about pre-menopause” despite the fact that many of them are not even thirty (178).

This toxic environment not only affects Fe, her coworkers, and their families but also the community as a whole as Fe is unaware of the toxicity of the chemical substances she is working with and is only told it is “Ether,” then pours them down the drain and into the water system. A foreman who discovers this reprimands her and instead instructs her that from then on she should let it just evaporate in the pan rather than pour it down the drain. The chemical, Fe discovers later on, should have neither been poured down the drain nor left to be evaporated but instead sealed in a container as it was “heavier than air.” If she had been letting it evaporate all along, Fe wonders, then where did it go if not in her (189). Fe only discovers the effects of her work in Acme International after a subpoena by the U.S Attorney General’s office, a subpoena she says she was told “by the federal government that she must not talk about to no one” (185). After she discovers her cancer, she is also visited by the FBI who inform her that the chemical she was dumping down the drain was illegal and that it was her fault because she had been the only one to use it. Fe reflects on the injustice of this by musing that “she did not understand how the Attorney General’s office could be so concerned about who was to blame for the illegal use of a chemical but wasn’t the least bit concerned about her who was dying” (187). Despite all of this, Fe continues to work at Acme even as her health declines in order to pay for the things she had bought on credit. Fe’s health decline

and eventual death is described violently. The cancer was “eating her insides like acid”, the medial treatment was “torture,” removing the cancerous moles left her flesh “scarred all over,” her body was “surgically scraped” and was in “agony.” Stress was causing her scars to “swell from hives” and a catheter for chemotherapy caused an infection that made her feel “like her brain wanted to pop out of her skull” so that by the time of her death there “was so little left of Fe to be buried” (186-187). This violent death the novel suggests is a result of corporate and government collusion and the military industrial complex that relegates Fe’s body as disposable. This collusion between the Pentagon, other mysterious contractors, their subcontractor Acme International, the U.S. Attorney General, and the FBI culminates in the investigation ending abruptly before anything could be done; “everything was dropped just as quickly and unexplainably as it had started” (188). The fact that the investigation is dropped quickly, that the Attorney General did not care about Fe or any of the other Acme workers dying or about the land and community that had been contaminated by this toxic waste makes Tome a fictional, but very familiar textbook example of a zone of sacrifice and the slow violence of toxicity.

It is not hard then to connect this zone of sacrifice to Mbembe’s necropower. In this sacrifice zone, Tome’s community’s autonomy and ability to live is excised. Settler colonialism creates an apparatus that chooses not only who lives and who dies, but gives this community no real recourse in response. In Achille Mbembe’s analysis of necropower and colonial occupation, Mbembe, borrowing from Frantz Fanon’s *The Wretched of the Earth*, describes the spatialization of colonial occupation as constituting a division of space into compartments and presents three major characteristics of necropower. First, is “territorial fragmentation.” Second, is the implementing of what Mbembe calls “vertical sovereignty” where the occupation operates “Over” and “Under” the terrain and third, is a “splintering occupation” where fragmentation is used to separate people from each other. He writes,

The writing of new spatial relations (territorialization) was, ultimately, tantamount to the production of boundaries and hierarchies, zones and enclaves; the subversion of existing property arrangements; the classification of people according to different categories; resource extraction; and finally, the manufacturing of a large reservoir of cultural imaginaries. (25-26)

These cultural imaginaries he argues are what give meaning to the enactment of differential rights to different categories of people within the same space. In the case of Fe and the other women working for ACME, the supervisors and medical staff talk to them as if they are “stupid” because they are “poor,” “uneducated” women whose first language is not English. They exploit their desire for promotions and financial stability by assigning them strenuous and hazardous working assignments and then deceive them about the nature of the chemicals they are working with as well as the nature of their maladies. The foreman gives them regular gloves and no masks to deal with all the hazardous materials around them and the nurses prescribe them ibuprofen to deal with the nausea and headaches as a result of the toxic fumes. We can also extend this analysis to include Mbembe’s assertion of colonies as zone of war and disorder “where the controls and guarantees of judicial order can be suspended—the zone where the violence of the state of exception is deemed to operate in the service of “civilization.” In this case the violence of Fe’s death is deemed trivial in the service of the production of high-tech weapons that will bring “democracy” as the novel references a war in the Middle East. Fe’s eldest sister Esperanza who has an M.A. in communications is hired for a journalistic job that requires her to travel to Saudi Arabia to cover a war. In Saudi Arabia, she disappears and is revealed later on to have been killed. Castillo therefore connects the two sister’s deaths. By including Esperanza’s mysterious death as a result of American wars in the Middle East, Castillo links American imperialism to toxic contamination and therefore the violence of the U.S.’s imperialism and colonialism is doubled. On one hand it commits

violence through the killing of civilians in the Middle East. On the other hand, it exposes its own citizens, through its reliance on a military industrial complex that extracts toxic materials, manufactures toxic weapons and disposes of toxic waste.

Fe's exposure to toxic waste through air contamination also brings to mind the Red Forest. In the case of the Red Forest, what it reveals is that not only does the violence of the nuclear explosion affect the surface of the ground within a specific geographical boundary but that the contamination reaches under the ground, can leach into the water and that radioactive particles and ash can find itself also in the air traveling thousands of miles outside the border of the exclusion zone. In terms of Fe, her violent death stands stark against the image of both Fe's dumping toxic chemicals down the drain and the evaporation of the chemical waste into the air. In both cases, the question that Fe yells to the foreman "So where did it go?" alludes to the fact that, yes, it was absorbed into Fe's body, but also it is absorbed into the bodies of the other women working at ACME as well as the air and water around Tome. In this sense, contamination is porous and knows no borders.

The novel goes on to describe the environmental devastation as a result of toxic waste and its effect on the lives of those within the community through a religious procession towards the end of the novel. This procession re-enacts "The Way of the Cross" a Christian devotion which recalls the last stage of the journey that Jesus walked towards his crucifixion in Jerusalem. The novel mentions religious processions and their importance to a predominantly catholic chicana/o community in great detail several times in the novel. This last procession that the novel describes however is not only different, it has a significance the other ones do not have as "there had never been no procession like that one before" (252). In this procession people were not carrying the usual representations of Jesus or Mary that would meet each other by the end of the ceremony but instead they were carrying photographs of the people who they had lost as a result of the toxic pollution. This act of

rewriting the narrative of Christ's sacrifice therefore becomes a form of protest at being sacrificed. Sofi, Fe's mother, holds the picture of Fe who died from cancer as a result of toxic waste. The procession is utilized therefore as a space of communal gathering to reflect on the toxicity within their communities "The crowd stopped and prayed and people spoke on the so many things that were killing their land and turning the people of those land into an endangered species" (252). When the story of Jesus being condemned is told, it is by a spokesperson of the committee protesting the dumping of radioactive waste in the area's sewers. The story of Jesus baring his cross was paralleled by another man describing the poverty of the Native and hispano families there. When Jesus fell, they told the story of people dying from toxic exposure in factories. When Jesus met his mother, three Navajo women talked about uranium contamination and its effect on the babies they gave birth to therefore reflecting how the slow violence of toxic contamination is multigenerational. One of these Navajo women goes further by critiquing western environmentalism, as she states,

We hear about what environmentalists care about saving the whales and the rain forests, too. Of course we do. Our people have always known about the interconnectedness of things; and the responsibility we have to 'Our Mother,' and to seven generations after our own. But we, as a people, are being eliminated from the ecosystem too... like the dolphins, like the eagle; and we are trying very hard now to save ourselves before it's too late. Don't anybody care about that? (252)

Through this, the novel offers a strong condemnation of mainstream conservation and preservation environmentalism and ties it to larger history of colonialism and imperialism.

The Navajo woman's objection to this kind of environmentalism, can also be extended as a critique of ecomodernists who support nuclear energy and other forms of technology without offering viable solutions for the people who bear the brunt of these forms of "green" solutions. The fact that environmentalists, the novel suggests, will spend resources

conserving eagles or whales but ignore the fact that an entire ecology that includes indigenous communities is being polluted is absurd and can only be made possible by relegating Indigenous and Chican/o bodies as disposable. It is also made possible through rhetoric that frames desert ecologies and reservations as dispensable dump sites disregarding the fact that these “sacrifice zones” are ecologies in and of themselves and home to an enormous amount of biodiversity as well as indigenous and non-indigenous communities. Native American activist Winona LaDuke succinctly reflects on this problem in a talk titled “All Our Relations” that she gave at Washington State University in 2001 as was quoted by T.V. Reed. Referring to Yucca Mountain, Nevada, a sacred site of the Shoshone people, chosen to be a main nuclear waste site, she says, “What happened when the best scientific minds and policy analysts in the world spent 20 years examining every possible way to deal with the problem of nuclear waste? They decided the solution was to ship the radioactive stuff thousands of miles from all over the country and dump it on an Indian reservation.”

By including the procession in the novel, Ana Castillo showcases the way a racialized community connects its immiseration with larger political issues. That the contamination of their water, the nuclear power plants near their ranchos, the deadly pesticides, the poverty, AIDS in Africa, the loss of their children in wars that the U.S had no business being in, are all part of a larger U.S. imperial and settler colonial project. The listing of these issues shows that these matters are not separate from each other but are all part of a larger issue of colonialism, imperialism, class and racial discrimination in the U.S.

A Close of Reading of Inas Halabi’s *Near the Caves Lies a Peach Orchard* :

Inas Halabi’s short story *Near the Caves Lies a Peach Orchard* is part of a publication titled “*Lions Warn of Futures Present*” commissioned by the Sharjah Biennial 13 Offsite project in Ramallah and curated by Palestinian curator Lara Khaldi. The publication combined stories and visual materials that consider both the visible and invisible effects of

radiation and chemical waste. Halabi asserts that upon embarking on this project “many stories [were] told about illegal burials of chemical waste in the south of the West Bank, sealed in caves and underneath layers of cement.” She suggests that similar to radiation, the stories and rumours around these burials “permeate and spread” and that “while this waste is made invisible as evidence, the stories and rumours are as real as the radiation emitted.”

Lions Warn of Futures Present, is part of an even larger project which is Lara Khaldi’s art installation *Shifting Ground*. This installation included art exhibits, publications and performances that probe the relationship between poetic infrastructures (such as folktales, urban myths and other forms of collective poetic authorship) and material infrastructures (such as media, power and waste) in Palestine. One of the three short stories that is included in the publication is Inas Halabi’s story *Near the Caves Lies a Peach Orchard* which utilizes folktales and rumours from the south Hebron hills to create a story about the effects of toxic radiation. The southern Hebron hills are a border region and are considered an Area C within the West Bank which means it is under full Israeli control. There are thirty Palestinian villages in this region and it is home to more than 4000 people who are mainly farmers. The southern Hebron hills border the Negev, where the southern part of Israel’s separation wall is located and is close to the Shimon Peres Negev Nuclear Research Center. The southern Hebron hills and the Israeli city of Dimona which are closest to the nuclear reactor (also called Dimona reactor) have borne the brunt of Israel’s nuclear program. It has been reported for years that the southern Hebron hills have become a site where Israel dumps its toxic waste. Although, Castillo and Halabi’s stories are dissimilar in genre what they do have in common is not just that they use elements of magical realism, it is also the fact that they both emphasise the way settler colonialism relegates the lives of vulnerable communities as disposable in the same way it relegates toxic waste. They explore the violence of toxic waste on the bodies of border communities. She starts her story with the sentence “That morning,

she felt as though her skin was on fire, stung by giant red ants” (1). The story itself never explicitly articulates the reason for this and toxic waste ends up functioning as an invisible agent within the story. Halabi intervenes to make what her story renders invisible, visible. She inserts footnotes throughout the short story that make toxic contamination visible. A footnote accompanies for example a sentence in the first page where the narrator within the story remembers a boy from a nearby village who was “born with a face half red”. The footnote goes on to make a connection between Halabi’s short story itself and the stories that Halabi had heard from locals living in the south Hebron hills. Speaking of the boy born with a deformity; she says, “A connection has been made between this case and the high level of radiation in Dhahiriyeh, a village in the south of the West Bank” (1). The inserting of radiation and toxic contamination within footnotes rather than the story itself is purposeful in that it functions in the same way that radiation and toxic pollution function. We may know it is there as the footnotes imply but in reality, as the story shows us, we cannot see it with our own eyes. The invisibility of toxic contamination is a point of deep tension within the text that is revisited often. The unidentified narrator who is only referred to by “she” wishes to document the effect of this contamination and “wonders how she can capture the damage of something invisible” (3). Photography seems to be her partial answer, so she takes her camera and points it at “landscapes, caves and mounds of cement” in fifty locations and collects samples of soils from these places (3). However, as she reflects later, while she sits at a monitor trying to sort through the samples of soil, she sees “nothing” and debates whether it is worth it to document toxic contamination at all.

While the toxic contamination is rendered invisible in Halabi’s short story, as she asserts time and time again, bodies retain evidence of this contamination. At some point the narrator laments her mortality, commenting on signs of aging on her face by stating that, she “wished her body would not retain the memory of its damage” (2). Halabi’s usage of the

phrase “memory of its damage” is interesting in this context in the sense that she connects human mortality and aging with that of the aging of nuclear atoms. In a footnote, Halabi states that nuclear atoms do not age with the passage of time however once they stabilize, they do not release radiation anymore. At first glance, one might be puzzled of the addition of this footnote to the story that contrasts human aging with the permanence of the nuclear atom. However, as you read along, it becomes clear that Halabi is making a point about the permanence of toxic waste and that its siting near certain communities is not incidental. As she writes later on referring to a character within the story named Nabil, “He told her of caves filled with strange materials and of concrete dyed to match the colours of indigenous stones. He also told of a dead cow lying in the middle of a golden field” (4). The caves filled with strange materials and concrete dyed to match indigenous stones implies concealment and yet despite this concealment the effect of dumping toxic waste is still there; seen through the image of the dead cow. This suggests that the narrator believes that the existence of these “strange materials” is not incidental. It almost becomes an imperative within the story then for the narrator to document and prove toxic contamination. What the eye cannot see, the body can feel and what photographs cannot detect directly, they can detect indirectly;

She woke up in the morning feeling as though her skin was on fire, stung by giant red ants. The burning sensation varied daily from slight, to moderate, to severe. She stretched her arms and turned sideways to face the familiar photograph now completely covered with white spots. These are the images of our gradual decay. (6)

Here Halabi goes back towards the end of the story to the narrator’s stinging skin. The repetition of this as well as the mention of a photograph completely covered with spots indicates her emphasis on nuclear contamination. Through mentioning the white spots on the photograph, Halabi references the history of nuclear contamination in the U.S. She does this

earlier in the piece also through an addition of a footnote on Kodak's accidental discovery of the U.S. nuclear project in the 50s that states that

The American government agreed to warn commercial film companies, but not the public, when testing was about to occur. After Kodak was warned, they would then wait for several months before using materials that had been contaminated with radioactive iodine-131, which is produced in abundance by nuclear tests. (3)

This footnote references the collusion between Kodak and the U.S. government to conceal the effects of radiation from nuclear testing which was discovered incidentally by Kodak. In 1997, a NYT article written by Matthew L. Wald titled "U.S. Alerted Photo Film Makers, Not Public, About Bomb Fallout" revealed that in the early 50s while the government denied the health threats of atmospheric nuclear tests, the Atomic energy commission regularly warned the Eastman Kodak company about nuclear fallout that could damage their products after Kodak threatened to sue them over fogged up film which they had discovered in their warehouse. By threatening to sue, Kodak pressured the U.S. government into not only revealing nuclear contamination but also into warning them about future tests so that they could protect their products on the condition that they would keep this knowledge secret from the public. Halabi's continuous referencing of the photographs with white spots alludes to Kodak's fogged up film. By adding this footnote, Halabi similar to Castillo, connects toxic contamination to American wars and the military industrial complex and directly compares the U.S. and Israel's attempts in regard to secrecy over their nuclear project. She does this at the very end of her short story too by including one more footnote that mentions a story circulated by Bedouins in the area about a girl who was kidnapped and whose memory had been erased by the Mossad after looking at sensitive materials relating to the disposal of nuclear materials in the south. While the existence of the U.S. nuclear project was exposed during World War II, Israel has kept their nuclear program a secret. It is believed today that

Israel has possessed nuclear weapons since 1967, though it neither confirms nor denies possessing nuclear weapons and refuses to sign the Non-proliferation Treaty. The existence of the Shimon Peres Negev Nuclear Research Center was only revealed in 1986 because of the whistle blower Mordechai Vanunu⁷⁷. Through this footnote, Halabi also connects Israel to the U.S, after all the atomic bomb was first built by the U.S and led to a nuclear arms race around the world. Despite the fact that the U.S. did not help construct the facility and in fact probably had concerns about its establishment, it still hid the fact that Israel possessed nuclear weapons and has made a decision to not pressure Israel into signing the NPT while still providing billions of dollars of financial support to Israel.

Halabi also seems to connect Israeli settler colonialism and nuclearism in Palestine to U.S. settler colonialism through the peach orchard. The addition of the peach orchard in the short story as well as in the title of the story itself is a curious one and may be interpreted as a reference to the Diné people's peach orchards in Canyon de Chelly, AZ, which were destroyed by Captain John Thompson's expedition in 1864⁷⁸. These peach orchards had been cultivated over hundreds of years by the Diné and Thompson destroyed them after the Diné had surrendered to his army. This has been interpreted by historians as an attempt at eradicating evidence that contradicted the image of Navajo as nomadic hunter gatherers. It could also have been because the peach orchard became a symbol of native presence and prosperity in an area that had been narrated as uninhabited and unproductive wasteland (Voyles viii-ix)⁷⁹. Peach trees are also one of the fruits cultivated in the West Bank. By adding, the peach orchard in the story near a cave that hides evidence of toxic waste, Halabi showcases the proximity of these disposal sites to the Palestinian residents of the southern

⁷⁷ The facility was constructed in 1958 through French assistance and in 2016 the U.S. National security archive declassified documents from the 60s and 70s that reveal that the U.S. was aware of Israel's nuclear program and that the Israeli prime minister at that time David Bene Gurion was purposefully obfuscating the purpose of the Israeli nuclear program.

⁷⁸ See Captain John Thompson's report "The destruction of Navajo Orchards in 1864" edited by Stephan C. Jett.

⁷⁹ Traci Voyles refers to this in her 2015 book *Wastelanding: Legacies of Uranium Mining in Navajo Country*.

Hebron hills. The peach orchard also serves as a symbol of Palestinian presence and therefore contests Israeli claims that the region is uninhabited wasteland paralleling and pointing directly to the similarities between these sites of colonization in Hebron and Arizona.

The tension within the short story around the invisibility of toxic contamination is important when thinking about the invisibility and insidiousness of slow violence. Her desire to capture that which is invisible brings to mind Rob Nixon's assertion that slowly unfolding environmental catastrophes present a representational obstacle that can hinder our efforts to mobilize (2). In the case of Inas Halabi's narrative, a source of anxiety within the text seems very much to be this same problem. We can see this play out in the motif of visual documentation that is repeated throughout the narrative. That narrative meditates on the purpose of documentation when one can see nothing while at the same time referencing the photos with the white spots that spread like a plague. The story ends with her waking up for another morning to face "the familiar photographs now completely covered with white spots" (6). The narrator calls these photographs "images of our gradual decay" (6). The last sentence in the short story reads "And then, she could remember nothing." By including this sentence as well as a footnote about a girl whose memory had been wiped by the Mossad as the last text in the story, Halabi seems to reflect on the dangers of attempting to mobilize or document toxic contamination. The narrative implies that such attempts at mobilization could render one invisible. The fear that the last sentence in the story invokes is purposeful and appears to ask us to rethink our conceptions of violence. Rob Nixon in *Slow Violence* asks us to rethink our assumptions of violence as a visible act that is newsworthy because it is "event focused, time bound and body bound" (3). The challenge he asserts is representational; how does one devise arresting stories and images that convey the violence's of delayed effects? Inas Halabi's answer to this seems to be both through short story and photograph. Other than talking about photography in her short story, she also includes photographs as part of the

larger exhibit that this story is part of. On her website, one can find both photographs and films about site visits to the southern Hebron hills. These images are mostly rendered in red, as if to bring attention to a contamination in the air that is invisible. Even though this contamination cannot be seen, by adding a red filter to the images, the audience feel a sense of danger and the landscapes she takes pictures of, appear as if they are on fire.



The picture above not only adds a red filter to as a way of visualizing the danger of radiation, but also centers the sheep within the image. As the community that lives within this “border” area often depend on sheep for their sustenance and livelihood, the image asks us to think through the effect of toxicity on their lands, their livelihood as well as their bodies. On one hand as their bodies are continuously exposed to radiation, their food is also contaminated and therefore not only do they grapple with toxic exposure but also toxic consumption. In another image, Halabi renders a photo of a desert field half red. The landscape in the

horizon appears normal but as we get close to the water well, the picture turns red. Although this could be interpreted as a mapping of the borders of toxicity, I interpret this is an emphasis on the toxicity of water; water that is scarce and the only means of life for these communities. The red light in this picture envelopes the immediate vicinity of the water well with the metal door. Although the picture only shows the entrance to the well with a hose coming out of it, the distended area around the concrete door with the metal door suggests that there is a large well underneath the bedrock. By bathing it in red light, Halabi visualizes what is rendered invisible.



In the end what both narratives problematize is the representational issue of the slow violence of toxic waste has on communities. In Castillo's *So Far From God*, even though Fe's toxic body is dismissed as evidence of crime and the chemicals she inhales are invisible, toxicity is visible through Fe's ruined body. In Halabi's narrative, despite the secrecy and the invisibility of toxicity, radiation, and contamination again toxicity is visible through the red stinging skin and the fogged-up photos. On the other hand, the celebrations of the visible flourishing of nuclear exclusion zones also part of this representational problem. In the face of this visual abundance, these narratives grapple with how to cite the mutilation and death of

human and non-human organisms and to put to word the long-term and often generational effect toxic waste contamination has on bodies.

Coda:

Israeli Population Anxiety in Palestinian Speculative fiction

“In the area allocated to the Jewish State there are not more than 520,000 Jews and about 350,000 non-Jews, mostly Arabs. Together with the Jews of Jerusalem, the total population of the Jewish State at the time of its establishment will be about a million, including almost 40 percent non-Jews. Such a [population] composition does not provide a stable basis for a Jewish State. This [demographic] fact must be viewed in all its clarity and acuteness. With such a [population] composition, there cannot even be absolute certainty that control will remain in the hands of the Jewish majority.... There can be no stable and strong Jewish State so long as it has a Jewish majority of only 60 percent.” Ben-Gurion 30th December 1947

In a 2003 speech at Herzliya Conference on security, Benjamin Netanyahu who was the finance minister at the time, opined that “If there is a demographic problem, and there is, it is with the Israeli Arabs who will remain Israeli citizens,” and that to ensure Israel’s Jewish character was not engulfed by demography, it was necessary to ensure a Jewish majority. “The separation fence” he claimed would also help with preventing a “demographic spillover” of Palestinians from the territories. ⁸⁰ Different chapters in this dissertation have all addressed infrastructures within settler colonial states that have environmental implications. These chapters have all explored the relays of settler colonialism, necropower and the environment. However, a running through line that has appeared within all of these chapters is the issue that Netanyahu brings to mind; that of population control or population management. At the risk of conflating these terms, this coda will conclude this dissertation by discussing this common theme that has appeared in my project. I argue that a common issue that permeates the literature that has been analyzed in this dissertation is an anxiety over demographics. In the end the state’s ability to decide who lives and who dies is closely tied up with a choice of who is considered lesser than and therefore must be eliminated; in the case of settler colonialism, the native is the threat and must be eliminated. Policies are therefore taken by a colonial power to eliminate those deemed undesirable or inferior through various means. As Patrick Wolfe asserts, settler colonialism’s aim is to eliminate the natives

⁸⁰ <https://www.haaretz.com/1.4802179>

both physically and metaphorically through various means including the renaming of indigenous spaces and destruction of indigenous knowledge and culture. In chapter one, this showed up in the attempts of environmental organization to obfuscate the truth and through the continued denial of the involvement of these organizations in the displacement of indigenous people in National Parks. Here the removal of indigenous people is both physical and metaphoric. Chapter two, also brings up this issue through the denial of water to Palestinian communities in the Jordan Valley as well the erasure of indigenous names from western colonial maps. In the third chapter it appears through the way toxic waste disposal is done in the “periphery” away from cities and near communities of color and indigenous communities at the expense of the bodies of these community members. What all these chapters demonstrate is that indigenous bodies are disposable to the settler colonial apparatus and in fact in some cases its objective is to intentionally reduce these populations rather than allow them to grow and so measures are taken to achieve that. As my previous chapters have argued, infrastructure, including environmental infrastructure in the settler colony, cannot be divorced from the violence of settler colonialism and that even if their stated objective is not to participate in the elimination of native peoples, by virtue of their establishment within this kind of apparatus they are implicated anyways. This coda does not discuss an infrastructure but instead wraps up the previous chapters by taking up the issue of population control and management that has appeared in previous chapters. It is therefore interested in demographics or more accurately the term “demographic threat.”

One of the arguments in this dissertation so far has been that as a consequence of settler colonialism’s anxiety over the existence of native populations, infrastructure (or more specifically environmental infrastructure) becomes implicated in managing these native populations. This management manifests itself through different ways including displacing these communities and ensuring that their population growth is impossible. Therefore, this

coda seeks to answer a question that was not addressed in any of the previous chapters; how does anxiety over demographics connect to population control in a settler colonial apparatus? Although demographics is not an infrastructure, the way the population question has manifested itself in this dissertation's general discussion around infrastructure and settler colonialism invites a further analysis of demographics as a tool of war and resistance. What is at stake is not only the way these demographics contribute to population anxiety in Israel and Palestine but also the way it contributes to a narrative that legitimizes population management, transfer and control.

Therefore in this coda, I am interested in showing the connections between anxiety over demographics, population control and environmentalism in the Palestinian/ Israeli context where there is a felt anxiety about demographics. This anxiety can be seen through the labeling of Palestinians by numerous Israeli leaders as a “demographic threat” or “demographic bomb.” I will do this through a reading of Ibtisam Azem’s speculative fiction novel *The Book of Disappearance*. Although this novel may not be seen as a novel on environmental or ecological issues, I think what it offers in terms of its analysis on the issue of population in Palestine and Israel engages with environmental debates and anxiety over the questions of human population growth on our planet.

I read the novel as a manifestation of the felt tension in Palestine and Israel (particularly Israel) over the number of Palestinians living within the occupied territories as well as inside Israel. It brings to mind Philip Dickinson’s assertion about colonial infrastructures giving an impression of colonial permanence, against which stands a native sector that is framed as a “biological problem” (299). Palestinian presence within the borders of what many Israelis believe are the borders of the state of Israel (From the river to the sea as the slogan goes) is a question that Israeli politicians have grappled with since the foundation of the state of Israel. The question of demographics was an issue that David Ben-

Gurion considered for example when he accepted the UN partition in 1947. The fact that many Palestinians were within the borders of what Zionists wanted to establish as the Jewish state however, meant that the Palestinian population had to be reduced. Under Ben-Gurion's direction, the Haganah worked to systematically reduce the Palestinian population which is what led to the Nakba (catastrophe) whereby 700,000 Palestinian's were expelled from their homes. It is also perceived that Ben-Gurion's decision to not extend the war by conquering the West Bank was because of the same demographic imperative whereby he feared the demographic implications of the large Palestinian population there despite wanting the territory. This is why when in 1967 Israel occupied the West Bank Levi Ashkol who was the prime minister at the time declared "We won the war and received a nice dowry of territory but it came with a bride whom we don't like." ⁸¹

Many of Israel's leaders have expressed regret about the fact that the Nakba in 1948 did not achieve its objective of expelling all Palestinians from within Israel and the territories (this expulsion is referred to by Israeli politicians as "transfer"). An article titled "A Strategy for Israel in the 1980s," by Oded Yinon a former advisor of Ariel Sharon which appeared in the World Zionist Organization's periodical *Kivunim* in February 1982 advocated that Palestinians be transferred and given Jordan as

Failing to take steps towards the Arab population in the new territories, acquired in the course of a war forced upon us, is the major strategic error committed by Israel on the morning after the Six Day War. We could have saved ourselves all the bitter and dangerous conflict since then if we had given Jordan to the Palestinians who live west of the Jordan river. By doing that we would have neutralized the Palestinian problem which we nowadays face, and to which we have found solutions

⁸¹ Lustick, Ian S. "The Red Thread of Israel's 'Demographic Problem.'" *Middle East Policy*, vol. 26, no. 1, 2019, pp. 141-149.

that are really no solutions at all, such as territorial compromise or autonomy which amount, in fact, to the same thing.⁸²

Often this “failure” or “mistake” has led to comparisons between the process of the colonization of the Americas and the process of establishing the state of Israel. These comparisons for example have led to discussions about whether these colonial projects had succeeded or failed in their attempts to eliminate native populations. Yasser Arafat for example pushed back in a 2004 interview that Israel had succeeded in subjugating the Palestinians by famously stating “We are not red Indians” and that Israel had “failed to wipe us out.” Although Arafat’s statements inaccurately assumed for example that the Indigenous struggle in the U.S. had failed and that the settler colonial project in the US had succeeded.⁸³ It brings up an interesting notion; that the Zionist project in Palestine had failed by virtue of the presence of the Palestinian within the borders of their historical homeland.

The turn to speculative fiction in Palestine.

Recently, there has been a turn in Palestinian literature towards the genre of speculative fiction with the publication of works such as *Palestine +100* an anthology which features the work of 12 authors and their vision of what life in Palestine would look like in 2048 (a hundred years after the Nakba that saw 700,000 Palestinian displaced). Although this turn is new, traces of this genre can be tracked all the way back to Emile Habiby’s 1974 satirical fiction *The Secret Life of Sa’ed: the Pessoptimist* where Sa’ed is saved by a friend from “outer space” and where his letters about his life as a Palestinian inside Israel come to us from outer space. Since then, a version of this story has appeared, more recently in Palestinian director Mo’min Swaitat’s dark comic solo titled “Alien Land.” I believe the

⁸² This article is now known as the Yinon Plan and was translated to English by Israel Shahak.

⁸³ Audra Simpson in a public lecture titled ““We are Not Red Indians” (We Might all Be Red Indians) Anticolonial Sovereignty Across the Borders of Time, Place and Sentiment” critiques this statement and takes it as a departure point to reflect upon the deep specificity and global illegibility of Indigenous struggle and life in the face of death and dispossession in North America.

recent turn to speculative fiction in Palestine aims to convey the horror of oppression and racism in Israel in an increasingly censored world where any critique of Israel or Zionism is labelled as anti-Semitic. I also interpret it as an attempt by Palestinian writers to reimagine their reality and future and rethink issues of identity, resistance, bi-nationalism and their existence in an increasing hostile place. What does survival mean for example for Palestinians in a state that still denies their existence and deems them a demographic threat? In her introduction to the anthology *So Long Been Dreaming: Postcolonial Science Fiction & Fantasy*, Nalo Hopkinson argues that postcolonial writers must engage with speculative fiction. Even though she acknowledges that the genre has a long and problematic history of othering of indigenous people and depicting conquest and colonialism as glorious enterprises, she argues that postcolonial people must engage with these genres in order to “critique it, pervert it, fuck with it” (Hopkinson 9). Hopkinson therefore calls for black and postcolonial writers to map out in their fictions new speculative frameworks that liberate rather than oppress colonized peoples. She asserts that our imagined futures cannot be exclusively white and Western, with people of color absent or peripheral, written out of humanity’s future and past. Although one may interpret Ibtisam Azem’s novel as doing just that since she disappears the Palestinians in the novel, I argue that Azem through this novel imagines other possibilities whereby the Zionist project of eliminating Palestinian presence from the land and claiming all the territory from the river to the sea does succeed and yet Palestinian presence remains not through a Palestinian collective memory but through an Israeli one. In an interview, Azem contextualized the fantastical elements within her novel by stating: “If you call it a fantasy, I guess that’s a place where I could have a lot of freedom to talk about how things are, as well as how they could be. The opportunities were limitless.” Rather than framing Palestinian presence in the occupied territories and Israel as an act of survival or endurance from the Nakba, Azem turns this idea on its head by imagining a different

possibility whereby the Palestinians disappearance does not induce a sense of victimhood but instead a sense of perseverance or “sumud”⁸⁴. Palestinian presence in this novel therefore is not tied up with the physical presence of the Palestinian within the borders of historical Palestine. The novel implies that existence is not limited to presence and that the Palestinian would still exist in the Israeli imaginary precisely because of the process of colonization through which the state of Israel came to exist. The perception of threat is not tied up necessarily to physical presence of the native therefore the perception of the Palestinian being a demographic threat the novel alludes would linger even without a physical population, because that threat is ingrained and permeates the psyche of the Israeli people.

Discussions on the annexation of the West Bank as well as the Trump administration’s recent “Deal of the Century” have renewed the discussions around Palestinian population growth. These discussions have centered on whether Israel could be both a democratic and Jewish state with continued Palestinian population growth and warned against a potential bi-national state. American politicians such as John Kerry and more recently Elizabeth Warren have cited this as an urgent reason why it is in Israel’s best interest to reach a peace agreement with the Palestinians. A simple search of the term “Palestinian demographic threat” produces articles that go back and forth on whose population or fertility rate is higher. A 2013 Op-ed in *Foreign Policy* titled “Israel’s ‘Demographic Time Bomb’ is a Dud” by Uri Sadot for example, declares that the concern over this question is a “dud” because of high Israeli life expectancy and the high fertility rate within the orthodox Jewish community. Whether it is a dud or not, Israeli anxiety over this issue is real. Michael Oren the Israeli ambassador to the United states in an article for *Commentary Magazine* in 2009 titled “Seven Existential Threats” listed the “Arab demographic threat” as one of the existential threats to Israel alongside “A Nuclear- armed Iran.” A 2018 article in the *Times of*

⁸⁴ Sumud means steadfastness and denotes a culture of resistance through various means.

Israel reported that Hebrew University demographers were defending military figures that indicated that the number of Palestinians will soon equal that of Jews in Israel and the Palestinian territories. This argument came to be after right-wing lawmakers attacked a senior military officer, Col. Haim Mendes, in the Knesset after he reported that there were nearly 5 million Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza. This statement prompted accusation of inflation with right wing politicians such as Moti Yogeve from the Jewish Home party accusing military officials of relying on Palestinian figures. The source of the fear for politicians such as Yogeve is about a broader debate within Israel about the consequences of annexing parts of the West Bank. Although, the goal of Israeli right-wing politicians is to be able to annex as much Palestinian land as possible⁸⁵, a big question remains: what if by doing so, Palestinians outnumber Jews? As this overview of the population question in Israel and Palestine indicates, whether these claims are true or not, Palestinians by virtue of their existence pose a continued issue for Israel. That is to say, the Palestinian does not even have to resist Israeli oppression and yet would still be considered a threat in the Israeli national imaginary to the very existence of Israel. In an interview with the Israeli newspaper, Haaretz, prominent Israeli historian Benny Morris predicted a grim future for his country; “This place will deteriorate into a Middle Eastern state with an Arab majority,” he declared referring to Israel and Palestine. “In another 30 to 50 years, they will overcome us, one way or another,” he added in a reference to Palestinians. Ibtisam Azem shows the manifestation of this anxiety in *The Book of Disappearance*. The idea of the book first came to Azem in New York in 2011. In an interview she asserts that she wanted to vanquish the myth of the Green Line and challenge the moral distinction that is made between the Nakba in 1948 and Naksa in 1967;

⁸⁵ This can be seen through current debates around Trump’s “Deal of the Century” which would annex most of the West Bank especially the Jordan valley.

I heard an interview with the [former] mayor of Jerusalem [Nir Barkat] in which he was saying that Palestinians in Jerusalem are equal, that they're citizens and get [municipal] services, all the propaganda we know. It was nothing new for me, but I was angry at how unchallenged he was. I thought about writing an article, and started brainstorming. Two things came to me: one was when [Yitzhak] Rabin said [in 1992], as defense minister, that he wished that the sea would swallow Gaza. And the second was a 2004 interview with the Israeli historian Benny Morris in Haaretz, about the second edition of his book about the Nakba ["The Birth of the Palestinian Refugee Problem Revisited"]. In the interview, he talks about the fact that they should have 'finished the work' [of ethnic cleansing in 1948]. Thinking about these two things gave me an idea: what would Israelis do if all Palestinians disappeared?⁸⁶

Population debates in Palestine and Israel mirror a larger debate around population in environmental scholarship and activism in both similar and different ways. As climate change poses an increasing risk to our survival, many see overpopulation as the fundamental cause of our climate crisis. The roots of this debate in the environmental movement can be traced back in the U.S. to the 18th century through English Philosopher Thomas Malthus but more concretely to the 1960's with Garret Hardin's essay "The Tragedy of the Common" and Paul R. Ehrlich's book *The Population Bomb*. Hardin, who is widely viewed as a white nationalist and who called for coercive constraints on reproductive rights to cap population growth has been influential to the rise of eco-fascism. His concept of the "lifeboat ethics" which he coined in 1974 has been subscribed to by eco-fascists such as the Christchurch shooter and the El Paso shooter who both railed against immigrant birthrates. Hardin's arguments around overpopulation gained traction with prominent environmentalist such as Edward Abbey and

⁸⁶ <https://www.972mag.com/ibtisam-azem-book-nakba-israel/>

David Brower who took up Hardin's argument in various ways⁸⁷. However, as the population question is a historically fraught one, and has prompted accusations of eugenics, xenophobia, racism, forced sterilization, and ant-immigration sentiment, environmental scholars often have to negotiate the ethical dimension of even debating the population question. In a settler colonial context it is virtually impossible to divorce population control from political control. The Sierra Club in the 90s nearly split over the issue of population and whether the organization should advocate immigration restrictions before finally deciding to adopt a more neutral policy. One of the ways this happened is the shift in the environmental movement's rhetoric from focusing on overpopulation to focusing on education and women's reproductive rights and "empowerment." However, recently there has been a turn to reconsider the population question especially among feminist scholars such as Donna Haraway's *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Cthulucene* where she calls for a redress of the population question by stating:

For excellent reasons, the feminists I know have resisted the languages and policies of population control because they demonstrably often have the interests of biopolitical states more in view than the well-being of women and their people, old and young...But, in my experience, feminists, including science studies and anthropological feminists, have not been willing seriously to address the Great Acceleration of human numbers, fearing that to do so would be to slide once again into the muck of racism, classism, nationalism, modernism, and imperialism... Avoidance of the urgency of almost incomprehensible increases in human numbers

⁸⁷ In 1963, Abbey reportedly wrote in a journal: "the population of America will reach 267 million by 2000 AD. An increase of forty million, or about one-sixth, in only seventeen years! And the racial composition of the population will also change considerably: the white birth rate is about sixty per thousand females, the Negro rate eighty-three per thousand, and the Hispanic rate ninety-six per thousand. Am I a racist? I guess I am. I certainly do not wish to live in a society dominated by blacks, or Mexicans, or Orientals. Look at Africa, at Mexico, at Asia. Garrett Hardin compares our situation to an overcrowded lifeboat in a sea of drowning bodies. If we take more aboard, the boat will be swamped and we'll all go under. Militarize our borders. The lifeboat is listing."

since 1950 can slip into something akin to the way some Christians avoid the urgency of climate change because it touches too closely on the marrow of one's faith (6).

Haraway's *Staying With the Trouble* was later followed by a book compiled by both Haraway and Adele Clarke titled *Making Kin Not Population* where they present the idea of promoting kinship as a solution to overpopulation rather than controlling women's reproductive right. The way that this issue has been taken up by scholars in the U.S. where at times population anxiety is rooted in racism and xenophobia is similar to the Israeli context. However, the way the issue has taken shape in Israel and Palestine is also different. In the Israeli case, population has become one more battleground with demographics and population growth utilized to keep a settler colonial status quo; an issue that Donna Haraway and other feminist writers have not really dealt with. Thinking through the different contours of kinship is dangerous to the Zionist vision of Israel that depends on population growth. To think and practice kinship would mean centering a one-state solution that is so strongly opposed by the Israeli right because of its perceived threat to a Jewish majority in Israel. Haraway's version of population control means Israel rethinking its national identity that is tied up with its Jewishness; a union that is a tenant of its existence⁸⁸. Israeli prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu and other politicians have long touted the need for settlement expansion and further infrastructural development to meet demand for the sake of accommodating further "natural growth"⁸⁹. On the other hand, population growth for Palestinians, has become a safeguard from unstable social systems, uncertainty and constant violence and war. Environmentalists in Israel decry the way construction is being carried out in Israel to account for this population growth at the expense of the environment, however they also

⁸⁸ In July 2018, the Israeli Knesset adopted the Basic Law: Israel as the Nation-State of the Jewish People also known as the "Nation State Bill." This law foregrounds that national rights in Israel belong only to the Jewish people. One of the clauses also states that "The state views the development of Jewish settlement as a national value and will act to encourage and promote its establishment and consolidation."

⁸⁹ <https://www.irishtimes.com/news/netanyahu-backs-natural-growth-in-jewish-settlements-1.770051>

struggle to articulate these concerns. Daniel Orenstein, a socio-ecologist at Ben Gurion University asserts that suggestions about limiting population growth among Israeli environmental scientists and activists has historically been considered beyond the boundaries of sanctioned discourse because of the way Jewish population growth is central to ideological, nationalists and religious beliefs in Israel⁹⁰. He goes on to assert that “Population growth (Jewish) is considered crucial for national and religious reasons. Therefore, any potential problems, environmental or otherwise, that may arise out of perpetual population growth should be dealt with through facilitation and accommodation, rather than confronted directly as an environmental challenge” (46). He asserts however that a change in the debates within this sanctioned discourse on population growth in Israel started to change during the 90s, but not in order to critique population growth but instead as prejudicial discussions whereby population is used as a tool to delegitimize the “other” as the demographic debate aggravated every social rift in Israeli society (Jewish-Arab, Ashkenazi- Mizrachi, rich, poor, etc.). Orenstein goes on to further argue that although environmentalist discourse around population may be shifting in Israel, this is not representative of the larger community in Israel as “Declining Jewish populations outside of Israel, the ongoing conflict with Palestinians and the perceived “demographic threat” within the country all keep population growth as an objective in the public agenda” (55). In fact, towards the end of his article, Orenstein asserts that “as long as the Israel-Palestinian conflict is unresolved, it is unlikely that population growth will receive a prominent place on the Israeli environmental agenda. Population is considered to be a weapon in the conflict” (56). This assertion about population as a weapon is not new in the context of Israel and Palestine. Phillipe Fargues

⁹⁰ Orenstein, Daniel. “Population Growth and Environmental Impact: Ideology and Academic Discourse in Israel.” *Population and Environment*, vol. 26, no. 1, 2004, pp. 41–60.

whose article “Protracted National Conflict and Fertility Change” is one of the few studies that deals with Palestinian demographics claims that the extreme contrasts of fertility in Israel and Palestine are a repercussion of the long-lasting “belligerence” between Palestinians and Israelis. In fact, Faragues states that a rise in education, women empowerment and women in the workforce in the West Bank and Gaza did not have an effect on women’s fertility rates in the 80s and 90s and on the contrary, there was an increase. He attributes this to a “state of belligerence” whereby in the aftermath of the 1967 war both Israeli and Palestinian politicians realized that demographic growth is the Palestinians most potent weapon (468).⁹¹ Therefore although the population debate in Israel and Palestine mirrors global discussions around population, they differ in the fact that they have a nationalistic and ideological dimensions that are unique. Addressing the question of population in Israel and Palestine is even more fraught because of the way it has been weaponized.

Reading of the *Book of Disappearance*

Ibtisam Azem’s *The Book of Disappearance*, imagines the mass disappearance of Palestinians that is left unexplained. The novel which was translated to English in 2019 by award-winning novelist Sinan Antoon centres mainly around two friends a middle-aged Palestinian citizen of Israel named Alaa and his Israeli Zionist leftist friend Ariel and the anxiety that the disappearance of the Palestinians causes. The novel describes Palestinians failing to show up to work picking flowers, doing surgeries, and driving Israeli buses. Newspapers are not delivered; cafes are not open, and a favorite hummus spot remains closed. The story therefore sets up different scenes that showcase the social, cultural and economic consequences of Palestinian disappearing on the Israelis. Shimon who owns a flower farm for example loses his cheap laborers, while Roni regrets the he will never be able

⁹¹ *Birth of the Nation: Strategies of Palestinian Women in Israel* by Rhoda Ann Kanaaneh makes a similar argument about Palestinian women in Israel.

to eat hummus at Sahtayn a restaurant owned by a Palestinian couple. Although, this can be seen as Azem's contention of significance of Palestinians to the very fabric of Israeli life and the disruption it would cause, I think this reading is over simplistic. I read it as going beyond just describing the effect of Palestinians on Israel and instead read it as an analysis on the possibilities and contradictions that settler colonialism provoke. This is shown clearly through the contradictory reactions to the Palestinian disappearance that induces a state of emergency. The reaction to this disappearance is a mix of disbelief, fear, anger, betrayal and relief. Most Israeli citizens' first reaction is to believe the Arabs must be on strike. The first news bulletin, at eight in the morning, declares a "state of maximum emergency...because the Arabs have declared a general strike. ... All of the Arab inhabitants of Israel, Judea and Samaria, and Gaza have disappeared." Part of this disbelief is the inability to comprehend that Palestinians would have the foresight to organize a protest. An initial report announces that, "It is worth noting that neither the Arab leaders in Israel, nor the Palestinian Authority, had declared their intention to stage a strike." The broadcast ends with a cheery, nothing-is-amiss weather forecast: "Sunny with temperatures reaching 20 degrees Celsius." The novel seems to reflect at that moment on the Palestinian state of affairs where very little credit is given to their ability to organize and resist Israeli occupation. That is why the novel indicates that not everyone believes it is a strike. In a specific moment, Ariel listens to a call-in show where a man named Daniel thanks "our brave soldiers who carried out a clean operation to rid us of the fifth column and terrorists who were around us everywhere... and achieved what we weren't able to do during the war of independence" (65). A statement that is not disputed by the expert on the show. The novel suggests that very few believe the army's strike claim and instead many believe that their own army had carried out a secretive operation that would spell doom for the country. By framing the disappearance as a "divine miracle" and as a solution to "a problem" the novel captures the relief from the anxiety Israelis feel about the

population question. The streets are no longer congested, house and apartments including in prime locations are now available and there is no longer a threat to the idea of a Jewish majority within the borders of the state of Israel.

In many cases the reaction is not anger, astonishment or horror about the possibility of genocide, but rather a concern out of self-preservation. When Ariel's ex bursts into his apartment to tell him about the disappearance she declares, "We're finished, they'll finish us off... The Palestinians have disappeared without a trace... Arab countries will attack us and tear us to pieces" (55) and then when he calls his mother she declares that the day reminded her of "Yom Kippur, when Arabs attacked us from all sides" (59). At an Israeli prison housing Palestinian political prisoner, the prison guards panic when they call out the numbers of those whom they believe were behind bars but hear no answer. The guards believing the prisoners had escaped are caught between bewilderment about how it could have been possible and anger. When the army enters Palestinian homes, the novel goes on to describe, they find TVs still on and tables full of food. By setting the story mainly in Jaffa and describing a scene where life seems to have been momentarily interrupted, the novel imagines Jaffa in the aftermath of 1948 when it lost most of its inhabitants and Palestinians left their homes with only their keys, thinking they would be back. Azem therefore transcends the boundaries of time and space in this novel and reminds us that what happened in Jaffa was a mass disappearance too and therefore the events of the novel are not far-fetched even if they are inexplicable. This is further seen through an implicit reference to ghosts and strange noises in the novel. Alaa addressing his grandmother in his notebook after she had passed reflects on his feelings of alienation after she tells him about the original names of streets in Jaffa by stating "Your Jaffa resembles mine, but it is not the same. Two cities impersonating each other. You carved your names in my city, so I feel like I am a returnee from history. Always tired, roaming my own life like a ghost. Yes, I am a ghost who

lives in your city. You, too, are a ghost, living in my city” (16). These uncanny elements lend the narrative a multidimensional aspect as if the Palestinians had simply been transported to an in-between dimension where they metaphysically exist and resist.

The novel starts with Alaa searching for his grandmother who has disappeared. Once he finds her, he discovers her to have passed while sitting on a bench overlooking the sea and reflects on the stories she told him about her life after 1948 and the disappearance of half of her family including her husband. The beginning of the book therefore connects the disappearance of the grandmother with a larger collective disappearance; a past one (the Nakba) and a future one (that of Palestinians as a whole in the novel). His grandmother’s death prompts Alaa to write down her stories and his memories of her through imagined conversations he has with her in a red notebook. This red notebook is discovered a few days later by Ariel, Alaa’s Israeli friend, after all Palestinians within Israel and the occupied territories have disappeared. Ariel finds this book by using a key Alaa had given him to confirm his disappearance. Although the novel states that Ariel did not relish this act of snooping as it was too similar to “that feeling he used to dislike back when he was doing his military service.” He nonetheless not only reads his neighbor’s red notebook but also steadily starts spending most of his time in Alaa’s apartment. As the narrative progresses, we not only witness Ariel reading about Alaa’s life including some of his most vulnerable thoughts about being a Palestinian inside Israel, but also painful memories of Alaa’s grandmother. This act of reading the red notebook turns within the novel from an innocent act of curiosity (Ariel thinks initially the red notebook might give him clues to Alaa’s whereabouts) to an exploitative and appropriative act of consumption. At the end of novel, as Ariel, who is a journalist and a liberal Zionist, comes to the realization that Palestinians had truly disappeared and that it was not going to bring doom to Israel, he starts thinking of the potential of having a narrative such as the one in the notebook and feels a new sense of

ownership over Alaa's story. He decides to select and translate excerpts from the notebook into Hebrew and to intersperse it with his own commentary. He plans to title it the "Chronicle of a Pre-Disappearance."

The act of exploitative consumption of the red notebook in *The Book of Disappearance*, mirrors that of Ariel's rapid takeover of Alaa's place and belongings. Ariel feels a right to investigate Alaa's apartment because of the neighborly spare key he possesses. He is not content however to leave it at that, as his curiosity about the apartment shifts to a curiosity about Alaa's possessions. Ariel tries out passwords on Alaa's laptop and picks up the red notebook that served as Alaa's journal. He looks through his music collection and even drinks his wine. At the end of the book, he makes himself comfortable within the apartment, sleeps on Alaa's bed (even though his own apartment is mere yards away). In a jarring moment Ariel eats Alaa's mother's cheese and spicy olives and makes Turkish coffee "just the way Alaa does" before heading back to Alaa's bedroom. In this moment the narrative implies that not only is Ariel in the process of appropriation, but also settler nativism through the process of consuming Alaa's material belongings as well as his story and memories.

In a rare moment, the novel introduces an article that Ariel starts to read by a radical leftist who decries the response to the disappearance and wonders how a surveillance state such as Israel could not explain the disappearance of an entire population. As this writer transitions to suggestions on how to proceed, Ariel abruptly stops reading the article in favor of listening to the Prime Minister's speech where he announces that anyone who is not in the country by 3 am the next day will not be allowed to return. We never learn therefore what the leftist writer suggests as a way to save the moral character of the country. The novel poses through this article vital questions that revolve around future restitution and even decolonization: how does one respond when an entire people disappear, especially when you

are part of the system that willed them into disappearance? What do reparations look like when there is no one to receive them? What does reconciliation look like? How do we decolonize when a place's original inhabitants are not there to participate in the process? The novel does not offer any possibilities or answers, however through this abrupt shifting from a narrative of restitution (the article) to a narrative of dispossession (the speech) the novel seems to suggest that although Ariel does not perceive his involvement, he is still complicit in the Alaa's disappearance. Through this Azem not only references the 1948 census which delegitimated Palestinian claims to their lands, she also seems to suggest that it does not matter whether Ariel or any of the Israelis had participated in the act of disappearing the Palestinians. Through the act of consuming their properties, their history, their knowledge and their memories they participate in the violence of settler colonialism; they become complicit simply by profiting from this disappearance. This is further emphasized through Ariel's mother who calls him to tell him she is heading to Haifa to claim an Arab house overlooking the Sea on Abbas street since she had heard from a military guy that they can buy them for cheap. Although Ariel is initially discouraging of this, he never answers his mother when she asks him why he is staying at Alaa's house and furthermore resolves to change the locks on Alaa's apartment despite the fact that it is rented. Ariel therefore in a sense becomes a metaphor for the infrastructures which this dissertation takes up. Just because they appear to be progressive or morally imperative does not mean they are not implicated in a settler colonialism. When tens of thousands of Palestinians fled Jaffa in 1948, their homes were often assigned to incoming settlers. These settlers and their descendants claim of innocence today does not make them less complicit in the process that expelled 700,000 Palestinians and then kept them as refugees. Ariel does not perceive his complicity in the disappearance and yet as the novel indicates he subconsciously is aware of it through the manifestation of his guilt. This manifests itself in the last chapter of the book where Ariel

keeps hearing rattles and whispers in the apartment as he attempts to transcribe the red notebook. Whether these whispers are imagined by Ariel or not, the narrative implies that he is haunted by the ghost of Alaa, just as Dayan an 80 year-old character is haunted by the woman he raped with his fellow soldiers in al-Lid.

Dayan in the novel appears as an even clearer representation of collective guilt than Ariel does. As a witness to the Nakba, Dayan recognizes his culpability in the rape and ethnic cleansing of al-Lid and justifies it as “defending the last spot they had left in the world” (165). As a result, he wavers about apologizing to the woman he raped even as he admits that “her silence haunted him” (164). Dayan feels further guilt when his wavering is resolved for him through the woman’s disappearance. Rather than feeling relief in that instance, he is troubled further and is haunted by her voice even more than her silence, which he describes as “glass shards” (168). Azem therefore implies by using both the phrases “haunted” and “hunted,” that the violence through which the state of Israel was established is a specter that will haunt the Israeli imagination. This act of haunting or hunting becomes a possibility for Palestinian presence and resistance. Furthermore, by exaggerating the scale of disappearance the novel appears to mock the anxiety Israeli’s feel around population to begin with, suggesting that the numbers do not matter, a demographic threat is not about population. Whether there are zero Palestinians or five million of them, ties to a place transcend time, boundaries and corporality.

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