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# It's in the "Weeds" : 'Pesky' Plants as Teachers in Imagining Decolonial Futures

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## I. Introduction

As a child living in Southern California, I recall afternoons I spent traversing hills of ice plant with my friends after school. We were on a quest to unearth hidden treasures found at its summit—crowds of beaming yellow flowers that we pulled up by their stems and chewed on. We reveled in the marvelous sourness that oozed from their stems once broken open, such a treat on those otherwise uninspiring late afternoons. Accordingly, these flowers were known by the elementary school community as "sour flowers." We knew how to identify them, what to do once we found them, and that they were treasures worth seeking out and taking home to our parents who scolded us for putting the so-called "random" plant we knew nothing of in our mouths. At the time, I had no idea that we were contributing to a place-specific folk knowledge shared between us kids, sparked by childlike wonder and our tendency towards the forbidden.

I have come to learn that the plant we had called "sour flower" is also known as Creeping Buttercup, or by its scientific name, Ranunculus repens. As a matter of fact, our parents were onto something—the plant's sour or acrid taste derives from a defense mechanism that makes the plant mildly poisonous by converting the compound ranculin into protoanemonin when crushed."[1] I have also learned that the low-growing perennial is widely considered a "weed", impossible to inquire about without encountering a slew of sources that instruct homeowners on how to control and eradicate the flowering plant from their lawns. I wonder: how could a plant so cherished by myself and my peers for its bright yellow pigment, delicate leaves, and wonderfully sour stems be treated as a pest to be ridden from the world? At what point in our lives do we cease to approach the natural world with curiosity and an appreciation for its gifts as they are revealed to us?

In my many returns to my hometown as an adult, I have encountered "sour flowers" continuing to grow in the areas I once visited as a child. They sit atop hills of ice plants, shining in all their glory; they abound in the in-between space where the beach

[1] Green Deane. "Buttercups. Eat the Weeds and Other Things, Too." https://www.eattheweeds.com/buttercups. January 21, 2023

meets the carved-out paths traveled by pedestrians and bicyclists and in community as buds that spring from patches of clover, reaching towards the sky to greet the sun. If these plants are unwelcome on homeowners' lawns, I know that no one will go out of their way to kill them off here, in spaces people tend to not give a second glance. Ironically, it is in willful neglect that the Creeping Buttercup can grow and exist peacefully. But even as kids we intuitively understood that interaction is not a detriment to life but necessary for its flourishment. In sharing my childhood memories of "sour flower," I've learned that many of my peers also grew up breaking apart plants in their mouths— whether they used to bite the stems of wood sorrel or called "sour flowers" by another name, our shared practice resonates across species and localities.

As it turns out, Creeping Buttercup is just one of the many plant species soured by misconception, ostracized from the rest of the plant community once grouped into the category of "weeds." To homeowners, gardeners, and conservationists alike, "weeds" are pesky nuisances that must be controlled, removed, and/or disposed of within the contexts they appear. "Weeds" are the "unwanted" plants we feel disgust towards, enacted upon through tactics of "weed" control, the "unruly" plants that we feel a fervent desire to annihilate, the "useless" plants we disregard, trampling over as we walk. Evidently, negative feelings towards plants called "weeds" are pervasive, hence why I think it's important to at least address: what is a "weed," anyway?

Surprisingly, "weeds" are not a taxonomy rooted in scientific fact so much as a culturally constructed designation.[2] Though many species considered "weeds" possess linked characteristics such as a rapid dispersal of seeds or an association with disturbed habitats, the categorization of certain plants as "weeds" is not derived from their shared, immutable characteristics.[3][4] Instead, "weeds" are generally defined as: "any plant that is not wanted or valued where it is growing," leaving it entirely in the hands of the individual, regulatory body, or dominant culture to determine: which plant is "valuable" or "desirable" within a specific geographic or ecological context?[5] What is the right or

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[2] Richard Mabey. *Weeds: In Defense of Nature's Most Unloved Plants.* Ecco
[3] George M. Briggs. "Dandelion." Inanimate Life. November 30, 2023 https://milnepublishing.geneseo.edu/botany/chapter/dandelion/.
[4] Ibid
[5] "Weed Definition & Meaning." Merriam-Webster. January 31, 2024. https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/weed

wrong place for a plant to be? Deeply entwined with culturally-relative notions of place and belonging, “weeds” are a subjective categorization, prompting us to engage with them in ways that are “edifying, conversational, and interpretative” rather than “demonstrative.”[67]

In ecological landscapes altered and manufactured by settler colonialism, the ways that “weeds” are categorized, spoken about, and acted upon provides a window into our modes of seeing and engaging with the more-than-human world, many of which operate at the expense of people and land. As we face various and accelerating crises of life propelled by the settler colonial, capitalist machine’s incessant guzzling of Indigenous lands and nature’s resources to fuel its endless expansion, it is of absolute necessity that we reckon with and reevaluate the teachings we inherit from these systems, in service of a better world.[8] While ecosystems and human relationships to land continue to be disrupted by exploitative and unforgiving settler colonial project here and elsewhere, it is imperative that our unwavering commitment to collective liberation structure the trajectory of our futures as we pursue the elusive “justice for all” – not as an ideal but a condition of life for *all* beings inhabiting this Earth.

I break up my project into three parts. Part one introduces “weeds,” establishing why an intervention into the ways we are taught to see and interact with “weeds” is critical. Part two is a breakdown of the theoretical concepts foundational to my examination of “weeds” – settler colonialism, the settler imaginary, and the biopolitical management of human/more-than-human life. Also in part two, I conduct critical discourse analyses on various forms of media that critically frame our understanding of “weeds” as uncultivated plants, namely – children’s movie *The Jungle Book,* Margaret Sanger’s rhetoric on “weeds” in the context of birth control, and the language of “weeds” invoked to describe the Zionist state’s military strategy against Palestinians in Gaza.[9]

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[6] Gianni Vattimo and Santiago Zabala. “A Dandelion Story, from Medieval Herbals to Whole Foods.” JHI Blog. October 31, 2024. https://www.jhiblog.org/2020/05/20/a-dandelion-story-from-medieval-herbals-to-wholefoods/

[7] Ibid

[8] I define “crises of life” as those that interconnect all living beings who reside on this Earth– ecological and climate crises, man-made crises of war and genocide, and crises of care, among others.

[9] The “Zionist state” is also known as the state of Israel

Part three is my case study of four “weeds,” each situated within the landscape that informs their categorization as a “weed” most: Dandelions within the manicured grass lawn, Motherwort in urban space, Stinging nettle and “the wild,” and ‘Akkoub & Za’atar and the “wilderness.” The presence of “weeds” within these contrived, settler colonial landscapes clues us into the largely unquestioned norms that construct and maintain these spaces as well as the relationships to land embedded within them.

In venturing to examine how these “weeds” have responded to their material conditions of existence, I look to these plants as teachers, mentors, and witnesses we can look to as we struggle to exist in and beyond the oppressive structures and norms that govern our lives. The rhizomatic structure of many “weeds,” which also makes them extremely difficult to get rid of, prompts us to engage all beings and systems as interdependent. Given that systems of oppression are collaborative in their efforts to dominate, subjugate and eliminate us, our struggles for liberation are necessarily intertwined. Therefore, I engage in comparative analyses between the treatment of people and land in two settler colonial contexts: Turtle Island and Palestine.

A just world is possible, and it is right beneath our feet. If we write off “weeds” as disreputable plants that exist solely to make our lives harder, we subsequently close ourselves off from the chance to (re)connect with these resilient and life-giving plants, survivors in a world cracking at its seams. “Weeds” teach us that our collective survival depends on us finding our way back to forms of intimate connectedness between human beings, more-than-human beings, and the complex ecosystems we are a part of.

In the words of writer and disability justice activist Mia Mingus: “If we cannot handle the small things between us, how will we be able to handle the big things?”[10] It is crucial to venture into the “weeds”—the tiny beings that sprout from our sidewalks and front lawns because, given that we are just a fraction of all life on this Earth yet retain a monumental impact, the small things matter. Aligning our ways of being, looking, and interacting with the pursuit of our collective liberation induces a ripple effect with a far-reaching impact for all life on Earth. Where we stand now is a precipice with immense transformative potential and “weeds”—the harbingers of this new world.

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[10] Mia Mingus “Leaving Evidence.” January 31, 2024. https://leavingevidence.wordpress.com

## II. Lit Review: Mapping Settler Ecologies

### A. Settler Colonialism

As I write this capstone from Dakota lands occupied by the United States, a nation founded on the genocide and dispossession of Indigenous peoples of Turtle Island, I ground my exploration of "weeds" in the analytic framework of settler colonialism.[11][12] A pervasive structure rather than a singular event, the settler's acquisition and exploitation of land through the uprooting of Indigenous peoples is, in fact, ongoing. Propelled by mythologies that reconstitute inhabited lands as empty, settler colonialism "destroys to replace," intent on transferring Indigenous lands to settler hands.[13] In pursuit of this goal, Patrick Wolfe writes, "invasion, destruction, and assimilation become [settler colonialism's] modus operandi."[14] The settler colonial structure enables the continued expansion of the settler's "territory" in perpetuity, its logical conclusion being the "elimination of the Native" for access to land.[15]

While the human dimensions of settler colonialism have been substantially engaged, I offer my contribution to the growing body of scholarship within settler colonial studies that considers the ways in which more-than-human beings are deeply entangled within the settler colonial pursuit of domination over Indigenous peoples, lands, and life.[16] As Métis scholar and anthropologist Zoe Todd writes, "we are left with the responsibility to query the ways that this structure (and/or its structures) co-opt, implode, violate and, in some cases, try to weaponize more-than-human relations and beings in the expansive and eliminatory logics of the settler colonial project."[17] By contextualizing "weeds" within the framework of settler colonialism, I contend with the

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[11] "Territory Acknowledgement," Native. https://native-land.ca/resources/territory-acknowledgement/.
[12] Turtle Island is a place-name for North America used by Indigenous peoples before and in resistance to the renaming of these lands as the "United States of America."
[13] Related to the founding Zionist slogan "a land without people for a people without a land."
[14]Patrick Wolfe, "Settler Colonialism & the Elimination of the Native,": Subversion Press.
[15] Ibid
[16] David R Cole, "More-than-Humanizing the Anthropocene," Institute for Interdisciplinary Research into the Anthropocene.
[17] Colin Hoag, "Commentary: The Environmental Anthropology of Settler Colonialism, Part I," Engagement. December 18, 2023.

ways that the settler colonial structure and its embedded ideologies subliminally reproduce anti-Indigenous ways of being and relating to the more-than-human world.

I situate my excavation of "weeds" within two distinct settler colonial contexts: Turtle Island and Palestine. To draw comparisons between the settler colonies of the United States and Israel, nations currently occupying stolen Indigenous lands, is not to conflate the two but rather to understand that while the particularities of these contexts differ, the mechanisms of domination employed by the settler colonial structure remain consistent. From the Israeli authorities and settlers' uprooting of more than 800,000 olive trees since 1967 alone to the US Government's fragrant violation of Anishinaabe treaty rights in order to construct the deadly Line 3 pipeline through Northern Minnesota, both settler colonial empires infringe upon the agency and life of more-than-human beings in order to restrict and/or deny Indigenous communities self-determination, all as a means of gaining access to and extracting from Indigenous lands.[18]

Rife with contradictions, settler colonialism operates through a capitalist mode of production. At its base, the settler colonial project requires stolen land and labor, actualized through the expropriation of Indigenous lands and the classing of the colonized and displaced as chattel slave. For example, the stolen labor of Indigenous Afrikans enslaved through the transatlantic slave trade that proved foundational to the settler colonial project of the United States' existence is "labor that can never be paid because payment would have to be in the form of property (land). The settler's wealth is land, or a fungible version of it, so payment for labor is impossible."[19] The severing of ties to land and suppression of Indigenous relationships with more-than-human kin, critical for the settler colonial project's continued expansion, is effected through both groups' literal displacement and the refashioning of land into capital, property, resource.

In alienating Indigenous peoples from their right to property, a set of "unalienable" rights are produced: "the right to own (property), the right to law (protection through legitimated violence), the right to govern (supremacist sovereignty), the right to have rights (humanity). In other words, whiteness is produced."[20] Under liberalism, the white

[18] Daisy Schofield, "Israeli Settlers Are Terrorizing Palestinian Olive Farmers," Tribune. December 18, 2023.
[19] Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang. "Decolonization Is Not a Metaphor." Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education, & Society 1, no. 1 (1–40).
[20] la paperson, "Land Is the Biopolitical Target," *Settler Colonialism Is a Set of Technologies.*

settler (granted these rights as the universal “human” under modernity) is enabled to produce capital at the expense of the subjugated classes (denied these so-called “unalienable” rights, including that to humanity.) Within the field of settler colonial studies, this is a set of power relations described as the settler/native/slave triad: “the settler who accumulates land, property, and rights, the Native whose presence on the land must be extinguished, and the chattel slave who must be kept landless.”[21]

The ever-growing accumulation of capital or “unceasing movement of profit-making” inherent to a capitalist economic structure enables the perpetual expansion of settler ownership over Indigenous lands and need for a constant supply of exploited labor via the displaced, chattel slave.[22] Remaking Indigenous lands and Black laborers into “property” serves to provide the quota of stolen land and labor required for the settler colonial project. The perpetuity of this exploitation is consistent with Western modernity’s timeline of “progress”—a linear, forward-moving force of accumulation by dispossession—the fundamental design of all of Western civilization.[23]

In *Decolonization is not a Metaphor,* Eve Tuck and T.W Yang write that “the disruption of Indigenous relationships to land represents a profound, epistemic, ontological, cosmological violence. This violence is not temporally contained in the arrival of the settler but is reasserted each day of occupation.”[24] Importantly, the settler colonial project is all-encompassing, infringing upon all forms of life in its quest to dominate as well as ongoing, fueling itself on violence that exacerbates each passing day—until decolonization.

### B. The “Settler Imaginary”

Etched into the foundations of Western knowledge systems (ideas, concepts, stories, etc. accepted as “truth”) are frameworks that reify the power and authority of

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[21] Ibid
[22] Adam Booth and Rob Sewell. “[Book] Understanding Marx’s Capital: A Reader’s Guide.” https://www.marxist.com/marx-capital-guide/3-chapters-4-8-surplus-value.htm.
[23] Emerging from the late 18th century onwards, Modernity refers to the system of values that Western civilizations were predicated upon: individual freedoms,
[24] Tuck, Eve, and K. Wayne Yang. “Decolonization Is Not a Metaphor.” Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education, & Society (1–40)

white, Western, settler colonial regimes facilitating the destruction of all life on this planet. While the settler colonial project seeks to eliminate Indigenous peoples for access to land, it simultaneously attempts to replace Indigenous peoples, knowledge systems, and ways of being with those of a pervasive settler society.[25] The relations of domination introduced by the settler colonial structure are continually reified through schooling, the media, and taught, social, perceptual practice.[26]

The process of categorizing plants as “weeds” ultimately comes down to how we situate ourselves within both the lands we inhabit and space-time more broadly. While human beings have always told stories about our place within this world, I am particularly interested in unraveling settler mythologies as they offer frames that lend credence to the settler state. In this section, I trace the stories and myths constituting the “settler imaginary” of the United States of America and Israel, specifically in the ways that they elucidate how cultural constructs such as “nature,” “the wild,” and “wilderness” frame our engagement with “weeds” as uncultivated plants.[27]

Indigenous landscape architect Dr. Alayna Pakinui Rā writes, “The erasure of Indigenous connections to lands and waters can be seen in a number of nations and is accompanied by the promotion of positive historical narratives about colonial settlement which were established to elicit feelings of gratitude by Indigenous peoples and mask feelings of guilt by settlers and their descendants.”[28] This phenomenon, termed “settler move to innocence” by Eve Tuck and W.Y Yang, is central to K-12 education within the United States, wherein the foundational and ongoing violence against Indigenous communities is omitted and Native tribes, instead, are taught as a series of tropes (the noble s*vage, the vanishing Indian, etc.).[29] This pedagogy is intentional—the settler state must preserve and reinvent itself by (re)educating the younger generation on an iteration of events that retrospectively justifies its existence.

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[25] Patrick Wolfe, “Settler Colonialism & the Elimination of the Native,”: Subversion Press.
[26] Linda Martin Alcoff. “Towards a Phenomenology of Racial Embodiment,” Radical Philosophy, https://www.radicalphilosophy.com/article/towards-a-phenomenology-of-racial-embodiment.
[27] Drawing from Charles Taylor’s concept of “social imaginaries.”
[28] “Whose History? The Colonial Project: The Role of Landscape Architecture in Correcting False Histories” December 14, 2024.
[29] Tuck, Eve, and K. Wayne Yang. “Decolonization Is Not a Metaphor.” Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education, & Society 1–40.

In elementary school I recall being taught about the holiday of Thanksgiving as the apolitical pilgrims “thanking” the Wampanoag tribe for their hospitality, kindly teaching them the laws of the land. We celebrated by dressing as pilgrims, making hand-turkeys, and “playing Indian.”[30] Of course, I only later learned that “the first Thanksgiving was declared in 1637 by Governor (John) Winthrop of the Massachusetts Bay Colony to celebrate the massacre of over 700 Pequot men, women and children on the banks of the Mystic River of Connecticut.”[31] To learn the sanitized and decontextualized version of these events as children is to turn legacies of massacres committed by settlers into sites of playful exploration. Further, being taught an account of history that legitimates the existence of the settler state removes any need for repair and the potential for any consciousness to grow regarding our positionality as settlers participating in the settler colonial project via our presence on stolen lands.

Embodied in the pedestalizing ways we are taught about the First peoples of the Americas as “noble s*vages” is the deep-seated notion that “nature” is something separate from all that is man-made, including “Man” itself.[32] Settler colonial ideologies preach that “nature” is the chaotic, unknown “wild” or the pure, untouched “wilderness,” and that “Man” is inherently superior to all nonhuman life forms.[33] The falsehood that pits “civilization” in opposition to “nature” is exemplified through normative depictions of Indigenous peoples in the media as “one with nature.” The white settler, in contrast to Indigenous peoples, who are stereotyped as “backwards” and frozen in time, is positioned on the track of progress as a “civilizing” force of good.

Take “The White Man’s Burden,” a prominent cultural text written in 1899 by Britisher Rudyard Kipling, who lived in India during the British Raj. In his poem, which he originally sent to his buddy Theodore Roosevelt in support of the US Colonization of the Philippines, Kipling urges white settlers (and their corresponding settler empires) to embrace the difficult “burden” of colonizing the “uncivilized” world. Under Kipling’s

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[30] Phillip J. Deloria, “Playing Indian,” Yale University Press. https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv2g5918z
[31] Phillip Martin, “Native Americans Gather in Plymouth to Mourn the Violent History behind Thanksgiving,” GBH. https://www.wgbh.org/news/local/2021-11-25/native-americans-gather-in-plymouth-to-mourn-the-violent-history-behind-thanksgiving
[32] Connecting back to the “unalienable rights” section—under Modernity, “Man” is the term that universalizes the white male settler.
[33] This philosophy reflects anthropocentrism

model, colonization is reconfigured as an act of benevolence that instills the so-called "sullen" peoples, "half devil and half child" with the ways of white goodness.[34] Colonized peoples are rendered subhuman, and their practices are made "backwards," supposedly incompatible as they are with white, Western "civilization."

Despite this poem being now largely critiqued for its blatant racism, we continue to subscribe to these colonial binaries, reproduced time and time again through media and rhetoric.[35] When I watched Walt Disney's 1967 rendition of *The Jungle Book* on VHS as a child, it was just a silly movie about animals who could sing. In retrospect, the film is a striking example of how mainstream childhood folklore, under the guise of "innocence," wields the tools of visual narrativization to normalize colonial power relations. The lens of critical discourse studies, which I employ in my analysis of *The Jungle Book,* prompts us to consider that, "as artifacts of the established culture and society, all cultural products carry meanings, values, biases, and messages,"[36] thus none can be the blank slate that "innocence" implies. The presumption of innocence applied to the children's genre accentuates the formative potential of these movies which subliminally frame the ways we are taught to see and think about the world.

The animated film, *The Jungle Book* (based on the novel by the aforementioned Kipling) can be read as an allegorical text structured around Kipling's interpretation of Indian society in relation to himself as a white colonizer. The film is centered around Mowgli, an Indian wild-child (a stand-in for Kipling himself), who is taken in by a wolf pack and taught by black panther, Bagheera (consistent with the noble s*vage trope) the necessary skills and laws of the jungle.[37] Upon ferocious, man-hating tiger Shere Khan's return to the jungle, where he was sole master prior to Mowgli's arrival, the boy's guardians begin their attempt to reintegrate Mowgli into the "Man" village for his own safety—to be with his "own kind." The human boy Mowgli's coexistence with the majority of the jungle animals does not seem to suggest harmony between the two

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[34] "The White Man's Burden." The Kipling Society. https://www.kiplingsociety.co.uk/poem/poems_burden.htm.

[35] Jack Halberstam. "Wild Things: The Disorder of Desire." Duke University Press.

[36] Meenakshi Gigi Durham and Douglas M. Kellner, "Media and Cultural Studies: KeyWorks (Revised Edition)", January 12, 2024

[37] Maurice Robichaud, "The Civilized Boy Who Cried Noble Savage." Medium. https://zodipunc.medium.com/the-boy-who-cried-noble-savage-2ef96ab8213.

worlds, but rather can be read as an allegory for how the colonized “serves” the colonizer: “Just like the Indian feudal lords who turned out to be the footstools of the colonizers, Bagheera teaches Mowgli such important techniques as hunting for food, climbing the tree tops and locating the traps.”[38]

By the end, it becomes clear that the animals “noble kindness” toward Mowgli exists solely to bolster the boy’s status as “master” of the jungle—in the movie’s final showdown between Mowgli and Shere Khan, Mowgli proves his dominance, banishing Shere Khan by setting him alight with “red flower” (fire), only to promptly leave the jungle to settle in “Man” village, for good. It is not insignificant that Mowgli defeats the tiger with fire, known to be Man’s supreme weapon and feared by all jungle animals, especially the antagonistic tiger. The final battle exchange between Mowgli and Shere Khan is therefore symbolic—the “civilized” prowess of the boy (emblematized through his use of fire) ultimately trumps the ferocious, destructive tiger, against all odds.

As Mowgli leaves for “Man village,” friends Baloo and Bagheera goad him on, saying, “Mowgli is where he belongs now… let’s get back to where we belong!”[39] The sentimental ending produces a clear message for the audience: the “law of nature” is one where all beings know where they belong, in each of their distinct places. As a cultural product, *The Jungle Book* enshrines dichotomies of civilized/barbaric and wildness/civilization that come through in Kipling’s work. The world of the jungle has its allure, certainly, but is overwhelmingly inferior to the world of “Man,” to which the world of the “jungle” stands in stark opposition. Further, the characterization of Shere Khan as the morally depraved tiger filled with hatred for "mankind,” positioned as undoubtedly the villain of the children’s story, mirrors the way that the Britishers write off righteous Indian anger as proof of the inherent barbarity of the colonized.

In contexts other than *The Jungle Book,* the rhetoric of the “jungle” continues to be evoked through characterizations of the colonized as “backwards.” In Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu’s now-deleted tweet from October 16, 2023, he describes the so-called war as “a struggle between the children of light and the children of

[38] Jamil Asghar and Muhammad Iqbal Butt, “Contrapuntal Reading of Rudyard Kipling’s *The Jungle Book:* Theorizing the Raj Through Narrativity, December 28, 2023
[39] Wolfgang Reitherman. *The Jungle Book*, 1967.

darkness, between humanity and the law of the jungle."[40] Through ascribed colonial binaries, Netanyahu employs the age-old colonizer trick of equating humanity itself with white settler "civilization," in contrast to the subhuman colonized society which is dictated, as he implies, by the "law of the jungle."

Accordingly, the colonial mindset pertaining to the "wild" suggests that nature possesses a mind of its own—the natural world governed by passive laws and untouched by the reality-shaping agents of white "civilization."[41] The dehumanization of the colonized into animals "at one with nature" severs colonized subjects from their agency, and further, blatantly erases the active role Indigenous peoples play in sustaining and shaping the environments they inhabit. This active/passive dichotomy gives birth to "wilderness," an environmental philosophy that both enshrines and facilitates settler colonial expansion.

The dissemination of the national myth that the "Frontier" was the last, pure "wilderness" on Turtle Island initiated a cultural shift. "Nature" beyond the settler's reach and conceptualization was no longer "the wild"—an object of fear and discomfort, but "the wilderness"—a romanticized and venerated landscape to escape into. Nature writings proliferated throughout the 19th century through the Transcendentalist Movement wherein notable Western writers such as Ralph Waldo Emerson and Henry David Thoreau wrote about a nature "uncorrupted" by human civilization awakening the individual, human soul.[42] For a movement accentuated by such romantic rhetoric, the move to "wilderness" was extraordinarily violent. The emergence of the National Parks movement in the US, spearheaded by naturalist and "preservationist" John Muir, necessitated the removal of thousands of Indigenous peoples and tribes from their ancestral homelands and the outlawing of traditional, life-sustaining practices.[43] In *Trouble with Wilderness,* Cronon writes, "The removal of Indians to create an

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[40] Poulomi Ghosh, "Netanyahu Deletes 'Children of Darkness' Post after Gaza Hospital Attacked." Hindustan Times. https://www.hindustantimes.com/world-news/netanyahu-deletes-children-of-darkness-post-after-gaza-hospital-attacked-101697588420656.html.

[41] Achille Mbembe, "Fanon's Pharmacy," chap. 5 in *Necropolitics,* Duke University Press, esp. 153

[42] Laura Dassow Walls, "The World Soul in American Transcendentalism." https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780190913441.003.0015.

[43] Isaac Kantor, "Ethnic Cleansing and America's Creation of National Parks." *Public Land and Resources Law Review* 28.

"uninhabited wilderness"—uninhabited as never before in the human history of the place—reminds us just how invented, just how constructed, the American wilderness really is."[4445] The wilderness fantasy is just that—a fantasy, perpetuating the harmful notion that people must be removed from land in order to preserve it and further, that a nature in its "untouched" or "natural" state ever existed in the first place.

Zionist settler colonialism similarly relies on mythology building, substituting fantasies of the great frontier for the tale that the State of "Israel," at its foundation, constitutes a restoration event. Under this model, Zionism is a "Judeo-Christian messianic effort to selectively *return* what is believed to be the original, or 'natural,' state of the land to Jewish hands, excluding others' through the idealized modern configuration of 'being in common': the nation-state."[46] The settler colonial project's intended goal of reinstating the mythologized, "natural" state of the landscape is, too, wound up in the myth of "wilderness." However, the key difference between the Zionist and American conception of "wilderness" is the emphasized role of settler agriculture in the cultivation of Israeli national identity. Throughout the 20th century, the Jewish National Fund (JNF), a prominent and well-funded Zionist organization, planted over 240 million monocultures of pine trees all over Palestine in an effort to "civilize" the semi-arid hills of Palestine and, further, to "erase the traces of the over four hundred Palestinian villages that were destroyed during the Nakba of 1948, after their inhabitants were forced into exile."[47] In short, the Zionist settler colonial project sought to expand through domination of the landscape, a deliberate attempt to erase the traces of Indigenous peoples who lived on and stewarded the land prior to displacement.

The phrase "we made the desert bloom" is a prominent Zionist talking point and a textbook example of greenwashing the inherent unsustainability of the settler colonial project.[48] The notion that Palestine was an arid wasteland before Zionist intervention is

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[44] W. Cronon, *The trouble with wilderness*. Shiplee, B.

[45] Cronon uses "Indian" in his quote to exemplify the official policy of "Indian Removal" enacted by the settler colonial project of the United States. I do not use this term in my writing as I am not Native and this reclaimed term is deeply embedded within white supremacist settler colonialism.

[46] Joanna Radin and Emma Kowal, "Reflections on the Zone of the Incomplete," in *Cryopreservation*, MIT press. Jan 18 2024

[47] Jumana Manna, "Where Nature Ends and Settlements Begin." Journal #113. Jan 22, 2024. https://www.e-flux.com/journal/113/360006/where-nature-ends-and-settlements-begin

[48] S. S. Hughes, S. Velednitsky and A. A. Green "Greenwashing in Palestine/Israel: Settler colonialism and environmental injustice in the age of climate catastrophe." https://doi.org/10.1177/2514848621106989

simply false.[49] Moreover, “the intrusive acidity of the pine trees prevented other vegetation from growing back, and the over-prevalence of the pines increased the frequency and force of wildfires.”[50] The planting of pine trees is often positioned as the Zionist state’s benevolent “success” in “retriev[ing] the Palestinian landscape from its perceived desolation,” but the land cries out for its Palestinian stewards to return.[51]

### C. Biopolitical Management of Human & More-than-Human Beings

The eliminatory logics that underlie the settler colonial project’s removal of Indigenous peoples from their lands for settlers to own and extract from produce a biopolitics encompassing both human and more-than-human life forms. In this section, I draw comparative analyses between the biopolitical management of “weeds” and dispossessed populations on both Turtle Island and Palestine, revealing the ways by which settler colonial notions of ethics and morality dictate which populations are granted rights considered “unalienable”—the right to live, govern oneself, and have a self-determined future—and which are deemed “unworthy” and therefore destined for social and/or physical death under the reigning colonial capitalist structure. The cultural discourses of the settler state, which single out some forms of life as impediments on “good” growth, manufactures consent for the State to exercise power to devalue and subsequently eliminate forms of life that do not serve its interests nor adhere to its permitted modes of being. As such, I engage with both Foucault’s notion of biopower and Mbembe’s notion of necropower as two sides of the same coin, biopower relating to a “positive” quality to “let live” versus necropower relating to the power to “subjugate life to death.”[52]

“Weeds” have found a place for themselves on restricted and prohibited species lists—on the US Department of Agriculture’s website, some “noxious weeds” are

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[49] Ibid, 496
[50] Jumana Manna, “Where Nature Ends and Settlements Begin.” https://www.e-flux.com/journal/113/360006/where-nature-ends-and-settlements-begin
[51] Irus Braverman, “Planting the Promised Landscape: Zionism, Nature, and Resistance in Israel/Palestine.” December 18, 2023
[52] Erica von Essen and David Redmalm. "License to Cull: A Research Agenda for Investigating the Necropolitics of Countryside Culling and Urban Pest Control" https://doi.org/10.1163/15685306-bja10129

relegated to a “must remove” status.[53] Implicated within settler colonial approaches to conservation is the logic that plants deemed “invasive” or “harmful” must be removed in order to protect or guard the growth of the “good” or “native” plants. However, within th approach to conservation is paradoxical—the same settler state founded on the genocide of Native peoples simultaneously positions itself as the ordained protector of Native species—some elevated to the status of “protection.”[54] This dynamic can be understood as an exercise of biopower. In the words of Foucault, “killing or the imperative to kill is acceptable only if it results not in a victory of political adversaries, but in the elimination of the biological threat and the improvement of the species or race.”[55] Within Western conservationist approaches, “weeds” or other “invasive species” are the “biopolitical threat” that must be eliminated in order to promote the “net good” for the “species or race” or cultivated plants.

Given that the logic of elimination is deeply embedded in eugenicist notions of life, it is no surprise that the language of “weeds” is ubiquitous within eugenicist texts that position “undesirable” populations as those that need to “weeded out.” For example, Margaret Sanger, prominent eugenicist and founder of Planned Parenthood, analogized the human population to a garden and birth control as a means of controlling and eliminating the “human weeds” that obstruct the growth and “purity” of the garden.[56] The implication here is that Black, brown, Jewish, disabled, and other “undesirable” people must be removed for the good of the white population. This allegory, (and Sanger’s work as a whole) is focused around reproduction—the elimination of these “undesirable” populations is necessary as is preventing new growth from occurring.

Accordingly, there are notable parallels between the practice of “weed control” and the practice of forced sterilization in the US. Both “weed control,” a billion dollar industry typically involving the application of toxic herbicides to a “weedy” area, and

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[53] “Noxious Weeds Program Home Page.” USDA APHIS | Noxious Weeds Program Home Page. https://www.aphis.usda.gov/aphis/ourfocus/planthealth/plant-pest-and-disease-programs/pests-and-diseases/SA_Weeds/SA_Noxious_Weeds_Program/CT_Noxious_Weeds_Program_Home.
[54] Jumana Manna, “Where Nature Ends and Settlements Begin.” https://www.e-flux.com/journal/113/360006/where-nature-ends-and-settlements-begin
[55] David Macey, “Rethinking Biopolitics, Race and Power in the Wake of Foucault.” https://doi.org/10.1177/0263276409349278.
[56] Rasheed Walters, “Eliminating ‘human Weeds’ at the Root of Anti-Birth Measures.” Boston Herald. https://www.bostonherald.com/2022/07/14/walters-eliminating-human-weeds-at-the-root-of-anti-birth-measures/.

forced sterilization, by which the United States government nonconsensually sterilized over 70,000 women—the majority of whom were Black, Indigenous, disabled, and working class—throughout the 20th century, are disturbing indictments of settler colonialism as a racialized and gendered project concerned with "replacing" Indigenous peoples and other racialized populations with a white majority.[57]

The settler colonial nation-state's enactment of ecocide and genocide simultaneously reveals that the fertility of racialized women and the concept of land as life force to Indigenous people are both existential, biological threats to the settler colonial project. The violence of settler expansion, rife with rhetoric of "taming the wild," is inextricably linked to violence against Native women, two spirit (2S), and gender marginalized folks and the imposition of a colonial, cisheteropatriarchal social order.[58]

Further, the biopolitical management of "weeds" through "weed control" is rife with militaristic language which holds true that "weeds" are the enemy 'other' or eternal threat that must be contained at all costs. Therefore, "weed control" is a prominent rhetorical tool for the military strategy of settler colonial nation-states. Take the settler colonial project of Israel, for example. Pro-Israel analysts have used the phrase "mowing the grass" to describe Israel's military strategy of "targeting militants" by indiscriminately carpet bombing Gaza, the cradle of popular resistance in Palestine.[59]

Once again, a human population is analogized to a natural landscape, this time, the grass lawn-scape. The phrase "mowing the grass" evokes the practice of lawn upkeep and implied removal of "weeds," a practice that I'll expand upon later on in my case study. Suffice it to say that Palestinians, particularly those who resist the settler colonial war machine, are both metaphorized and treated as "weeds" that must be mowed in order to maintain the sanctity of the grass lawn. David M. Weinberg of the Jerusalem Institute for Strategy and Security wrote, "Just like mowing your front lawn, this is constant, hard work. If you fail to do so, weeds grow wild and snakes begin to

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[57] "The Supreme Court Ruling That Led to 70,000 Forced Sterilizations." NPR. https://www.npr.org/sections/health-shots/2016/03/07/469478098/the-supreme-court-ruling-that-led-to-70-000-forced-sterilizations.

[58] "Root Source: Cis-Heteropatriarchy." Annenberg Media. https://www.uscannenbergmedia.com/2022/03/31/root-source-cis-heteropatriarchy/.

[59] Adam Taylor, "The history of Israel 'mowing the grass' in Gaza," the Washington Post. https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2021/05/14/israel-gaza-history/.

slither around in the brush."[60] In his statement it is implied that, for one, "weed control," or in reality, population and social control, requires constant "hard work", or in this case, the settler state of Israel's routine deployment of airstrikes. His quote is also reminiscent of *The Jungle Book,* in which Indigenous people are likened to "wild" creatures that must be controlled and kept in their place of captivity and defeated by the destructive forces of "civilization," otherwise they present a pervasive threat.

In seeking to eliminate Indigenous peoples for access to land, the settler state also exercises necropower through processes that "increase the potentiality for death."[61] This is often through indirect forms of violence, namely the poisoning and desecrating of Indigenous lands, waters, and air to deliberately create conditions that do not support life. During Westward Expansion, settlers slaughtered thousands of Buffalo—animal kin and food source for many Native tribes in and beyond the so-called Midwest—to deliberately punish and starve Indigenous tribes for resisting the confiscation of their lands by settlers.[62] It is no coincidence that this runs parallel to the Zionist settler state's intentional uprooting and burning of olive trees—plant kin and life and food source for Palestinians.[63] In *Land Is the Biopolitical Target,* la paperson writes that the settler colonial project's targeting of the land serves to 1) eliminate Indigenous presence and 2) make the land alienable.[64] Once made "alienable" or severed from their own sovereign life, the capitalist value of more-than-human beings "does not depend on whether they are living or dead but on their fungibility or disposability."[65]

In the late stage of neoliberal capitalism we are currently situated within, structural neglect is increasingly the means by which the State exposes populations deemed "disposable" to a premature death.[66] Often referred to as "wastelands," necropolitical zones inhabited by these so-called disposable populations "embody the

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[60] Adam Taylor, "The history of Israel 'mowing the grass' in Gaza," the Washington Post. https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2021/05/14/israel-gaza-history/.
[61] Brenda K. Wilson, Alexis Burnstan, Cristina Calderon, and Thomas J. Csordas, "Letting die" by design: Asylum seekers' lived experience of postcolonial necropolitics"
[62] *Lakota Nation v. United States,* directed by Jesse Short Bull and Laura Tomaselli. 2022.
[63] Daisy Schofield and Daisy Schofield, "Israeli Settlers Are Terrorizing Palestinian Olive Farmers," Tribune. December 18, 2023
[64] la paperson. "Land Is the Biopolitical Target ." Essay in *Settler Colonialism Is a Set of Technologies*
[65] Ibid
[66] Ruth Wilson Gilmore. *Golden Gulag: Prisons, surplus, crisis, and opposition in globalizing California,* Univ. of California.

material consequences of natural destruction."[67] The disproportionate exposure of Black and Indigenous communities to environmental harm is not merely a symptom of the colonial capitalist structure but central to its functioning.[68]

While "wastelands" are deliberately manufactured by the State in an exercise of necropower, the notion that these areas are hopeless for human life adheres to the same fallacy as that of "wilderness," except, without the romanticization—wastelands are framed as places where life goes to die. Similarly to how we are taught that Native peoples are of the vanquished past, the myth of the apocalyptic city serves to divert our attention away from those who suffer from structural neglect at the hands of the settler colonial, capitalist state and its institutions.

### II. Case Study – Dandelions, Motherwort, Stinging Nettle, 'Akkoub & Za'atar

In this section, I conduct a case study of dandelions and three other "weeds" (Stinging Nettle, 'Akkoub, Za'atar, and Motherwort). For my framework, I borrow from settler colonialism and critical environmental justice scholars in reading landscapes as texts that do important cultural work. In the context of settler colonialism, built landscapes are inscribed with narratives, ideological frames, and discursive practices that serve to naturalize and legitimize settler sovereignty.[69] As such, the physical landscapes tied to the settler colonial project are not "natural" but produced space that must be continually reproduced through ingrained social and perceptual practice or the ways we are taught to see, think about, and interact with these landscapes.

In interpreting landscapes as texts, I invoke Phil Deloria's notion of the "anomalous" versus the "unexpected" to consider the ways by which the presence of "weeds" on settler colonial landscapes can be understood. The difference between the two is that the "anomalous" reinforces categorization while the "unexpected" resists categorization, bringing the entirety of the categorization into question.[70] Defined as

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[67] Traci Brynne Voyles. *Wastelanding: Legacies of uranium mining in Navajo country*. University of Minnesota Press.
[68] "Moving towards Environmental Justice: The Flint Water Crisis & Structural Racialization." UAB Institute for Human Rights Blog, Jan 14 2024.
[69] Mar T. Banivanua. "Settler-colonial landscapes and narratives of possession," Arena Journal.
[70] Phillip J. Deloria, "Playing Indian," Yale University Press. https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv2g5918z

uncultivated plants that grow where they are unwanted, “weeds” exemplify the site of the “unexpected,” bringing into question and consequently, challenging the dominant ideologies embedded within these contrived landscapes. As the site of conflict within these textual landscapes, I explore how the practice of “weed control” introduces a push-and-pull dynamic—the supposed out-of-placeness of “weeds” is acted upon in tangible ways and “weeds” consequently respond to the conditions imposed upon them.

In conducting my case study, I grant agency to “weeds” as animate beings while I observe how they respond to “weed” control and conversely, to acts of care by Indigenous relatives. In resisting normative standards of being and existing under the capitalist, settler colonial structure, “weeds” not only teach us about what these norms are, but how we can effectively resist them. In framing “weeds” as resistance narrative, I borrow Indigenous botanist and scholar Robin Wall Kimmerer’s concept of plants as teachers. She writes that in Indigenous ways of knowing, “plants are respected as bearers of gifts, as persons, indeed oftentimes as teachers... Creative, wise, and powerful, plants are imbued with spirit in a way that the western worldview reserves only for humans.”[71] If we closely observe “weeds” not as pests but as kin, as teachers, we are able to intuit their valuable teachings as we move towards just and sustainable futures.

### A. The Manicured Grass Lawn

*“dandelions don't know whether they are a weed or a brilliance. but each seed can create a field of dandelions. we are invited to be that prolific. and to return fertility to the soil around us.”* – adrienne maree brown, *Emergent Strategies* [72]

The story of dandelions on Turtle Island is complex, fitting for a plant that tends to transgress all marked delineations, borders, and boundaries in how they grow and where they grow and that they grow at all. To trace the cultural story of dandelions, invigorated by my own experiences tending to the plant, is to situate them within the

[71] Robin Wall Kimmerer, *Braiding Sweetgrass*, Langara College.
[72] adrienne maree brown, *Emergent strategy: Shaping change, changing worlds*. AK Press.

landscape that has informed their categorization as a “weed” most— the American suburban grass lawn-scape. The advent of the manicured grass lawn or recasting of land from source into property marks the dandelions’ fall from grace—hearty, garden plant to reviled “weed.” The manufactured cultural crisis over the presence of “weeds” on a homeowners’ grass lawn which translates into the well-exercised (and expensive) practice of lawn upkeep, reminds us of the ways that “weeds” are subjectively defined within the cultural imagination and subsequently acted upon in destructive ways.

Prior to the construction of the manicured grass lawn-scape, dandelions were considered valuable and actively cultivated by settlers on Turtle Island. Not an original inhabitant of these lands, the common dandelion (an herbaceous perennial flowering plant in the daisy family Asteraceae) was brought to these lands by colonizers, who cultivated the plant species in their gardens at home in Europe for food and medicine.[73] To immigrant families who settled in the Americas, dandelions were not intruders but valued crops utilized in various culinary applications—their lion-toothed leaves eaten as salad greens, their flowers used to make wine, their roots seeped in teas, and more.[74]

Throughout the 20th century wave of suburbanization, however, the advent of the grass lawn-scape and its associated ideals marked a profound shift in the cultural conception of dandelions—now considered a lowly “weed.” While the contrived landscape of the grass lawn can be traced all the way back to the Enclosure Acts of Great Britain, the modern history of the lawn has its roots in the low-cost housing projects developed by the Levitt family, owners of prominent real estate development company, Levitt & Sons. The Levitt’s, particularly father Abraham and son, William, paved the way for cookie-cutter aesthetic values pervasive within the social fabric of US suburban communities. At the forefront of it all, the lawn held a particular importance to Abraham Levitt, who wrote: “No single feature of a suburban residential community contributes as much to the charm and beauty of the individual home and the locality as

[73] “The Dandelion’s Fall from Grace Has Been a Doozy. Can This Weed Become a Flower Again?” WTTW News. https://news.wttw.com/2020/05/14/dandelion-weed-flower-history.
[74] Mary Menniti, “Foraging for Dandelions.” The Italian Garden Project. https://www.theitaliangardenproject.com/blog/foraging-for-dandelions.

well-kept lawns."[75] An emblem of homeownership, a "well-kept" lawn was said to communicate the respectability of not just an individual but a neighborhood altogether.

Within this sweeping exercise of conformity, though, who gets left out? Entrenched in historic and ongoing legacies of racial segregation, redlining, and white flight, American homeownership was designed to systematically exclude Black Americans from access. In developing Levittown, one of their largest suburban housing projects in Long Island, New York, the Levitt's themselves refused contract clauses to non-white residents, enacting a restrictive racial covenant that ensured that only white Americans could live there.[76] With this context in mind, neighborhood ordinances that regulate and standardize the appearance of suburban homes and the individual suburbanites' desire for a "perfect" manicured lawn replicate ideals tied to the original project of the suburbs, intent on the formation and preservation of a "whites-only" space.

An emblem of whiteness, the manufactured grass lawn-scape reminds us that the refashioning of land into property is linked, inextricably, to the settler colonial project's intention to "replace" Indigenous lifeways and presence on the land with that of a white, settler society.[77] First and foremost, the "ideal," suburban grass lawn is composed of turf grasses that bear little to no resemblance to the perennial grasses native to Turtle Island.[78] Secondly, these turf grasses are a form of monoculture, a largely unsustainable agricultural practice of cultivating "a single crop or plant species over a wide area and for a large number of consecutive years," critiqued by Native and non-Native farmers and agriculturists alike for optimizing production at the expense of harnessing the land's natural biodiversity.[7980]

Rather than source of food and/or medicine, the lawn presents the natural world as a solitary unit for its owners to use recreationally and for passerby to gawk at. It makes abundant sense, then, that the practice of lawn care does not resemble land

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[75] Gail Pellet, "Our Lawns Are Killing Us." Medium, January 6 2024. https://medium.com/@gpellett4/our-lawns-are-killing-us-c980e29cb9f7.
[76] Rachelle Blidner, "America's First Suburb Still Trying to Shed Whites-Only Legacy," Newsday.. https://projects.newsday.com/long-island/levittown-demographics-real-estate/.
[77] Roxanne Dunbar Ortiz, *An Indigenous People's History of the United States*. Beacon.
[78] Extension Web Support. "Ecolawn: Less Work and Water." OSU Extension Service.
[79] "Monoculture." Wikipedia, January 25, 2024. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Monoculture.
[80] "Monoculture Farming: Is Monoculture Good or Bad?" SustainableSlice, September 25, 2023. https://sustainableslice.com/monoculture-farming

care-taking practices utilized by Indigenous stewards and can be better understood as a set of purely performative practices enacted to adhere to a set of established social norms and curated aesthetics that sanction one's belonging within a given suburb.[81]

When it comes to the grass lawn-scape, where there are spoken and unspoken rules homeowners must follow or face fines and/or ostracization, any plant that is *not* a strain of the various invasive monocultures (Kentucky bluegrasses, bermuda grasses, zoysia grasses) comprising the normative, American grass lawn is unwanted, and, by definition, a "weed."[82] As a result, dandelions proliferating in moist, sunny areas, are no longer welcomed visitors on the homeowners' grass lawns but detested foe, inherently at odds with the ideals of the contrived grass lawn-scape.

The manicured grass lawn-scape must be continually and actively reproduced, often through the practice of "weed control." Regularly mowing their lawns and applying herbicides to "weedy" patches, homeowners maintain the standard, uniform look of their lawns by curtailing the growth of any "deviant" characters that make an appearance. However, unlike mowing, a pervasive social practice that, as Israeli military strategist David M. Weinberg wrote, requires *constant* hard work, herbicides are marketed as a quick fix, the solution to pesky "weeds" that inevitably pop up. In order to effectively sterilize an area of dandelions, homeowners or "weed" removal agencies commonly apply broadleaf-killing herbicides, or "weed killers," not only killing "weeds" on residential lawns but also damaging the grass, shrubs, trees, and neighboring plants.[83]

We can observe parallels between these practices of "weed control" and Sanger's "population control"—both biopolitical processes that undermine the growth of the "undesirable" population to allegedly preserve the sanctity of the "desired" population. Within the grass lawn-scape, only trimmed-down turf grasses are "desired" and so we witness violence enacted upon dandelions and other nonconforming plants in an effort to eradicate them. What was their crime? Falling outside of what was the acceptable norm within the space they found suitable to grow.

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[81] Marta Fiolhais, "The Indigenous Roots of Regenerative Agriculture ." Rainforest Alliance, https://www.rainforest-alliance.org/insights/the-indigenous-roots-of-regenerative-agriculture/.
[82] "Invasive and Exotic Grasses and Grass-like Plants." Invasive and Exotic Forbs and Herbs. https://www.invasive.org/species/grasses.cfm.
[83] "Lawn and Yard." NDSU Agriculture, July 23, 2021. https://www.ndsu.edu/agriculture/extension/extension-topics/gardening-and-horticulture/lawn-and-yard/.

The settler colonial project's supremacist compulsion towards sameness links the fates of all us nonconforming beings residing on these lands. In the chapter "Over the Course of The Day" in the *New Farmer's Almanac,* June's group metaphorizes the practice of lawn upkeep: "We likened the routine mowing of the lawn to the repeated and unending acts of erasure that are systematically executed within public land in the United States of America: of histories, of identities, of difference. The monoculture grasses became our homogenized bodies."[84] Evident through the interlinked histories of forced sterilization, dispossession, and assimilation on Turtle Island, the dissolution of difference in service of ethnonationalism and cisheteropatriarchy is etched into the fabric of the United States of America and carried out indefinitely through both direct violence and gradual attempts at assimilation and erasure.[85]

While "weed control" methods can be effective, in many cases, (as reflected by the various forums of homeowners seeking advice for "stubborn" dandelions on their lawns that refuse to vanquish) herbicides are unsuccessful in obliterating the "weeds" or do not effectively prevent the growth of more dandelions. This push-and-pull dynamic is characteristic of all life on Earth, summed up by the notion that killing births resistance.[86] Just as widely-used antibiotics that target some bacteria often result in the growth of antibiotic resistant bacteria, herbicide application often breeds herbicide-resistant "weeds."[87] In response to this, herbicide companies and "weed control" agencies continuously innovate and sell new products to "kill more effectively," often at risk of replicating this same dynamic, time and again. The capitalist structure's incessant drive for innovation runs parallel to dandelions' incessant drive for survival.

Furthermore, dandelions, like other lawn "weeds," possess qualities that are geared towards survival, namely their ability to grow rapidly in the wake of disturbance and their taproots, which can penetrate to a depth of up to ten to fifteen feet below the soil.[88] With "wide-spreading roots [that] loosen hard-packed soil, aerate the earth, and

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[84] June, "Over the Course of a Day," Essay in *New Farmer's Almanac: Adjustments & Accommodations*.
[85] Ethnonationalism is a form of nationalism that ties ethnicity to core components of "nationhood."
[86] Evolutionary biology — killing births resistance
[87] Joel Haywood, Grishma Vadlamani, Keith A Stubbs, and Joshua S Mylne. "Antibiotic Resistance Lessons for the Herbicide Resistance Crisis." *Pest Management Science*. https://doi.org/10.1002/ps.6357.
[88] "Dandelions," Maine.gov. https://www.maine.gov/DACF/php/gotpests/weeds/factsheets/dandelions-cal.pdf.

help reduce erosion" dandelions are natural fertilizers, their taproots pulling nutrients from deep in the soil to make available to other plants with roots more shallow.[89] Their taproots also make dandelions incredibly resistant to annihilation by herbicide as they often appear dead on the surface level but retain life underground, with their roots intact.[90] In ideal conditions, dandelions' germinate wind-borne seeds, making them difficult to wipe out in order to "sterilize" a lawn and even more difficult to manage, as "one seed can create a whole field of dandelions."[9192]

Though treated as a lawn pest, we have much to learn from the pest-like qualities of the common dandelion. In resisting attempts at sterilization by continuing to proliferate their seeds regardless, dandelions reiterate that cultures of homogenization cannot contain us or the abundance and persistence of our growth. Put simply, we will not be erased and our growth can not be contained. Our unencumbered expression is not just noncompliance but an active endeavor towards a world that honors us in our multiplicity rather than asserting there is one, right way to be.

As non-native plants, dandelions do not feed into the colonial mentality of harm and destruction, introducing an immigrant land ethic.[93] They rarely crowd out native plants within the ecosystems they inhabit and instead, offer their abundant resources to their plant neighbors and to human visitors, who can choose to identify the various magical qualities of these plants, be it the whimsy of blowing them out or to harvest for medicinal purposes.[94] Like all of us, dandelions are healers, participating in the mending of the wounds that settler colonialism leaves upon these lands, our bodies, and our spirits.[95]

### B. Urban Space

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[89] "Ten Things You Might Not Know about Dandelions." Maine Organic Farmers and Gardeners, https://www.mofga.org/resources/weeds/ten-things-you-might-not-know-about-dandelions/.
[90] Ibid
[91] Ibid
[92] adrienne maree brown, *Emergent strategy: Shaping change, changing worlds*. AK Press.
[93] *New Farmer's Almanac: Adjustments & Accommodations*, Greenhorns.
[94] Joe Rankin, "Dandelions: Make Salad, Not War with Lawn Invaders: The Outside." Northern Woodlands. January 17 2024.
[95] Jenny Wren. "Finding Hope down in the Weeds." Medium, August 14, 2023. https://medium.com/weeds-wildflowers/finding-hope-down-in-the-weeds-709b40f04489.

*The word apocalypse comes from Latin meaning "revelation" and from Greek "apokalyptein" meaning to 'uncover, disclose, reveal. Its roots go from apo "off, away from" kalyptein "to cover, to conceal." I want to see the time of crisis as one in which we are given a chance to see things clearly*. – *The Great Uncovering* by Virginia Vigilar [96]

In 2021, in the wake of the assassination of Winston Smith at the hands of the State and subsequent murder of organizer Deona Marie Knadjek, the community in Uptown, Minneapolis built a memorial garden on the intersection of West Lake Street and Girard Avenue South.[97] Tended to by community members, activists, organizers, roller-skaters, gardeners, and artists, the garden served as a community healing space, up until its demolition by the city—garden supplies loaded up in dumpsters and bulldozed like herbs and vegetables were never grown there.[98] But we know that the memorial garden was here, continuing the long-practiced tradition of sowing seeds in urban space. In the Twin Cities alone, community urban gardens have served to transform sites of violence and neglect with loving hands into spaces of hope and inspiration from the murder of Jamar Clark to the murder of George Floyd.[99]

This practice, often referred to as "guerilla gardening" is a protest, according to Richard Reynolds, author of *Guerilla Gardening* because "it's gardening in a space where you don't have permission" and therefore it's a political act."[100] From this, I feel prompted to ask—what does it mean to garden in a place you don't have permission to? What does it mean to *grow* in a place you don't have permission to? I take it as no coincidence that the State feels similarly threatened by the existence of guerilla urban gardens as it does by the presence of "weeds"—both convey signs of life where there is death and decay, operating outside of the rules and limitations imposed upon governed space. These organizers teach us that the antidote to neglect is care, and us caring for

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[96] Virginia Vigilar. "The Great Uncovering." The Great Uncovering - by Virginia Vigliar, November 11, 2022. https://virginiavigliar.substack.com/p/the-great-uncovering.
[97] "Uptown Community Garden Removed over Concerns of Continued Unrest." CBS News. https://www.cbsnews.com/minnesota/news/uptown-community-garden-being-removed-over-concerns-of-continued-unrest/.
[98] Thank you Natalina.
[99] Kim Hyatt, "'Guerrilla Gardens' Take Root across Twin Cities." Star Tribune https://www.startribune.com/guerrilla-gardens-take-root-across-twin-cities
[100] Ibid

one another and the world we inhabit is existentially threatening to a State that would prefer that we are all dead.

Motherwort is often known as a “weed” and I’d like to think of her as the mother of all “weeds.” She is a perennial of the mint-family and, like dandelions, not native to North America but rather to Central Asia and Europe.[101] The last time I encountered Motherwort was on a walk along the river in late January, her leaves peeking through layers of dead leaves and rotting branches. At a time when all the living creatures had begun their descent into rest, her presence felt symbolic—like any good mother, she wanted to show the way, to remind me that life is messy but small and feeble growth is still growth. It is no revelation, then, that there is a long history of Motherwort being used medicinally—to support the heart, nervous system, and reproductive cycle. Famous herbalist, Nicolas Culpepper once wrote about Motherwort: “There is no better herb to drive away melancholy vapors from the heart to strengthen it and make the mind cheerful and to settle the wombs of mothers.”[102] Where the world around us is in disarray and where our hearts and souls are wounded, impacted by immense and ongoing crises of care, we can look to Motherwort as a “weed” capable of nurturing our emotions, bodies, and ecosystems. She knows the way.

The day I found Motherwort, she was situated within the city-scape where Minneapolis’s Main Street meets the cliffs of the now dammed over St. Anthony falls. Already, her existence pokes holes in the aforementioned construction of urban space as a derelict “wasteland,” positioned in opposition to pristine “nature.” There is some legitimacy to this claim: processes of industrialization driven by racial capitalism disproportionately expose US metropolitan areas to pollution, environmental harm, and institutional neglect, creating non-ideal conditions for life to grow.[103] But filling in the gaps left by this negligent State are burgeoning mutual aid networks, including community urban gardens which counter food apartheid by cultivating and distributing

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[101] “Common Motherwort (Leonurus Cardiaca).” iNaturalist. January 10, 2024 . https://www.inaturalist.org/taxa/56171-Leonurus-cardiaca.
[102] WishGarden Herbs. “Motherwort: A Mother’s Lion-Hearted Love.” WishGarden Herbs, January 12 2024.
[103] P. Vasudevan and S. Smith, “The domestic geopolitics of racial capitalism. Environment and Planning C: Politics and Space,” January 12, 2024. https://doi.org/10.1177/2399654420901567

fresh fruits, vegetables, and herbs.[104] The growth of healing “weeds” such as Motherwort in these urban areas demonstrates that even nature herself does not doom these spaces to death and degeneration—from one small sprout to a bed of herbs, fostering conditions that sustain life can be as simple as ensuring access for all.

While the State functions to keep marginalized communities dependent on its institutions so that we cannot build collective power, exercise self-sufficiency, and form networks of community care, I observe a budding consciousness all around me—that our institutions do not meet our needs, that we take care of one another. In the words of John Trudell, Native American activist and author: “The Earth gives us life, not the multinational corporate Government.”[105] If we are witnesses to the vitality of creation, a vitality which has the power to consume all man-made, capitalist infrastructure, and if we as human beings are a crucial part of this life force, then we are raw power itself. It is our responsibility to this land and to all life on this planet to not surrender to these life-destroying systems what is rightfully ours: our collective power and humanity.

“Weeds” often grow on disturbed land or land that violence has been enacted upon.[106] Urban space, then, can be read as a manufactured site of disturbance, broken down by the violence of capitalist extraction and domination. The modern-day cityscape, abandoned by the State and left to fend for itself, presents a clear picture of the reality that will inevitably affect us all, wherever we reside—a society that has begun to collapse. Living within a world cracking at its seams whilst preparing for the inevitability of large-scale rupture is not easy and perhaps why I look to the margins (where life has persisted for years and years, unacknowledged) for instructions on how to live on the, albeit “disturbed,” edges of what *could be.* Off the beaten path on Main Street, my short encounter with Motherwort reinstilled in my spirit the notion that sometimes, it means everything to just survive. And mother knows that in order to survive individually we must also invest in our collective survival—with strong, self-sufficient communities and robust support networks, these crumbling systems are rendered obsolete.

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[104] Mary Castillo, “Designing Food Deserts: Urban Planning & Food Apartheid.” The Aspen Institute. https://www.aspeninstitute.org/videos/conversations-on-food-justice-designing-food-deserts-urban-planning-food-apartheid/.
[105] “We Must Take Care of the Earth ~ John Trudell.” Creative by Nature. https://creativesystemsthinking.wordpress.com/2016/06/30/we-must-take-care-of-the-earth-john-trudell/.
[106] Land body Defense. http://landbodydefense.org/uploads/files/VLVBReportToolkit2016.pdf.

Sometimes, when I walk along the sidewalks of Minneapolis, Saint Paul, Los Angeles, I notice uneven rifts in the pavement where the roots of a tree, once trapped under thick layers of cement, break free underground, desperate to stretch out once and for all. It is in these crevices that "weeds" tend to grow—a few weedy tendrils unfurling from a sidewalk crack can be muse for resistance in a time when life itself seems to have become a political act."[107] Importantly, this collision between the inner workings of nature and the infrastructure of our highly-industrialized society should not be overgeneralized as a typical "man v. nature" narrative. The distinction between "man" itself and exploitative systems that denigrate "nature" is particularly vital in these contexts wherein this push-and-pull dynamic can be summed up as the resistance of nature and her allies' to the destructive ways of the settler colonial, capitalist machine.

"Weeds" that sprout in between the world that was and world that is coming are harbingers of critical teachings. Like Motherwort, we all bring a piece of the story, together mapping the critical instructions to our futures.[108] If we abandon settler temporalities and reconceptualize the future as our actions *here* and *now* rather than some distant moment over *there,* we behold that what we choose to do in the present actively shapes the trajectory of our lives, for generations to come.[109] Whether it be tending to seeds rooted in the soil, keeping small fires alight, and/or providing nourishment and healing, we all maintain a crucial role in the making of our collective futures, springing from the cracks of these disturbed edges.

### C. In the "Wild"

***"****There has been given to every creature a weapon of self-defense. Yes, even the grass and trees have a weapon, a sharp spear, or a poison…" [110] In the Beginning, The Sun : The Dakota Legend of Creation*

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[107]Alyssa D. Paredes, "Weedy Activism: Women, Plants, and the Genetic Pollution of Urban Japan." *Journal of Political Ecology*, https://doi.org/10.2458/jpe.2299.
[108] Thank you Annie Humphrey for your truly valuable wisdom.
[109] Marie Haley, "The Seventh Generation Principle 7 the Seventh Generation." The Seventh Generation Tours Akaroa New Zealand. https://theseventhgeneration.org/blog-the-seventh-generation-principle/.
[110] Eastman, Charles Alexander, Gail Johnsen, and Sydney D. Beane. *In the beginning, the Sun: the Dakota legend of creation*. St. Paul, MN: Minnesota Historical Society Press.

Stinging Nettle (*Urtica dioica)* is a wild plant or "weed" that finds its natural habitat on "fertile, muddy, slightly disturbed ground, especially among the lush herbage of nutrient-rich slit in river valleys and woodland clearings," complicating delineations between the world of "man" and the "jungle" wrapped up in the cultural construction of the "wild."[111] The stinging plant, covered in tiny hairs (trichomes) that release chemical compounds upon contact with skin, is enmeshed in morally relative projections of "good" and "bad," establishing "weeds" as a moral as well as cultural category. Rather than seeing the "weed" as the Devil's Spawn, I engage with Stinging Nettle as a teacher, offering us a prickly reminder to respect the autonomy of living beings, all of whom's natural defense mechanisms are activated when we infringe upon their agency.

If "wilderness" is the Garden of Eden, then the "wild" is the terrain Adam and Eve were banished to, left to fend for themselves. In this story from the book of Genesis, God responds to Adam and Eve's "original sin" by cursing the ground, plaguing Adam with "thorns and thistles."[112] The biblical creation story prompts strong feelings about "weeds," forever tied to the "thorns and thistles" born out of God's curse. The negative moral connotation that follows "weeds" around is especially pertinent when it comes to Stinging Nettle whose prickly thorns are emblematic of this curse placed upon "Man."

Known by many names, Stinging Nettle has been historically called both the "Devil's Leaf" and the "Spawn of Satan," names that project the negative cultural associations with the "Devil" onto "weeds."[113] Thus, when Stinging Nettle pricks us, we declare the plant to be an outright evil character, designed to hurt us. This attitude proliferates in secular associations as well—the English word "nettled", meaning irritated or angry, is derived from observations of the Stinging plant.[114] For a while, it was thought that Stinging Nettle (the dioica species) was an aggressive invasive species, a theory

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[111] Richard Mabey. *Weeds: In Defense of Nature's Most Unloved Plants.* Ecco
[112] "The Curse on the Man, Part 2." Grace to You. https://www.gty.org/library/sermons-library/90-246/the-curse-on-the-man-part-2.
[113] Richard Mabey, *Weeds: In Defense of Nature's Most Unloved Plants,* Ecco
[114] "Nettle definition and meaning." Collins English dictionary, January 22, 2024. https://www.collinsdictionary.com/dictionary/english/nettle.

that would justify such strong feelings of animosity towards the “weed”, but the work of geneticists reveal, to the contrary, that the plant is, indeed, native to Turtle Island.[115]

Evident from the Stinging Nettle plant’s negative connotations, the uncultivated world of “thistles and thorns” associated with the “wild” is a subject of fear to the white, settler society. Perceived as external to the world of the “civilized,” the cultivated, the “real,” the colonizer’s perceived lack of control in these environments causes a great deal of discomfort. In response to this, the colonizer and his entity of “civilization” double down on attempts to control and eradicate the “wild beasts” that lurk within this world.

The fear of the “wild” is a byproduct of the settler colonial project’s intent to erase the land’s Indigenous presence—settlers who arrived on Turtle Island, for example, cleared out dense polycultural forests stewarded by Indigenous peoples of Turtle Island in an attempt to “destroy centuries and millennia of farming, gardening, and land caretaking practices.”[116][117] Settler pedagogies that teach us to approach the “wild” with fear as opposed to curiosity are fatal to our ecosystems. We know this because wildfires, which run rampant across the continental United States, are sparked by dry, overgrown vegetation set ablaze—a consequence of the absence of human interaction and lack of preventative measures put in place.[118] Instead of “seedy” characters, we can recognize the overgrown shrubs and “weeds” of our forests’ today as valuable teachers, signaling to us that our ecosystems are out of balance and in need of restorative care.

It is widely acknowledged now, (even by federal agencies that once fought to outlaw these practices) that the Indigenous tradition of cultural or prescribed burning is our first line of defense against total wildfire disaster.[119] Practiced by Indigenous nations for millenia, cultural burning is propelled by the notion that fire is medicine.[120] Under dry and wildfire-prone conditions, intentional fires are essential—they “replenish food,

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[115] Clay Bowers, “The Plant That Fights Back: Stinging Nettle.” https://www.nomiforager.com/blog/2020/4/14/wonderful-sting.
[116] Alfred W. Crosby *Ecological Imperialism: The Biological Expansion of Europe*
[117] Ibid
[118] Katelyn Weisbrod. “Increasingly Large and Intense Wildfires Hinder Western Forests’ Ability to Regenerate.” Inside Climate News. https://insideclimatenews.org/news/06032023/wildfire-forest-regeneration/.
[119] Justine Jones, “How Indigenous Burning Practices Could Revitalize a Northern Minnesota Forest,” Mpls.St.Paul Magazine. https://mspmag.com/arts-and-culture/how-restoring-indigenous-burning-practices-could-revitalize-/.
[120] Ibid

cultural and medicinal resources and reduce wildfire fuel by eating away at overgrown vegetation."[121] When it comes to prescribed burns, fire is the harbinger of both destruction and creation. This form of destruction does not intend to replace but to transform— a means of creation, a contribution to larger cycles of life, death, decay, and regeneration. Prescribed burns can be violent but such force is only wielded necessarily and with the clear intention of protecting our forests, a vital source of life for us all.[122]

Stinging Nettle similarly wields violence as a form of self-defense, releasing stinging chemicals only when it feels threatened.[123] The mere fact that Stinging Nettle is often referred to as "aggressive" for its stinging tendencies and tough, fibrous roots reflects the ways we are taught to interact with the plant world.[124] We feel that we should be able to move through these plant's natural habitats with impunity, without respect for the autonomy of these beings and the boundaries they communicate to us. Through my research on Stinging Nettle, I learned that the plant is not only rich with minerals and vitamins that nourish our bodies, but the stings of the Nettle plant themselves can actually alleviate arthritis and joint pain overall.[125] Like prescribed burns, Stinging nettle in some contexts is a case of when "short term pain leads to long term gain."[126]

Abhorred for its ability to defend itself, there are noticeable parallels between the treatment of Stinging Nettle and the villainization of popular resistance movements. The oppressor wishes to have the monopoly on harm (we can hurt *them* but they are not allowed to hurt us back.) Whether subconscious or not, the white settler society does not perceive its own systematic malice as violence, even asserting that the violence of the oppressed is somehow "unprovoked." From the Black Panther's to the Palestinian Resistance, the playbook is the same—the people's resistance to their decades of subjugation is demonized by the oppressor class who'd rather cast the actions of the oppressed' as indicative of the oppressed' depravity than dare examine the conditions

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[121] Ibid
[122] Human and more-than-human beings alike
[123] Bowers, Clay, "The Plant That Fights Back: Stinging Nettle." https://www.nomiforager.com/blog/2020/4/14/wonderful-sting.
[124] "Stinging Nettle." Department of Environmental Conservation. https://dec.ny.gov/nature/animals-fish-plants/stinging-nettle.
[125] Sáŋ, Posted byMaštíŋčala. "Plant Stories." Plant Stories, March 17, 2024. https://dakotaplants.wordpress.com/.
[126] Ibid

that provoked such a response.[127] Stinging Nettle, demonized by the same oppressor class, shows us that, when other vehicles of communication are absent or ineffective, a prickly sting is meant to communicate something.[128] As living creatures, we instinctively resist erasure—sometimes that involves persistent and unyielding growth (like dandelions) and other times, that means not going down without a fight (Stinging nettle).

The last time I was stung by Stinging Nettle it was a lack of foresight on my part. I had recognized the plant from its dark green, mint-esque leaves, residing on the outskirts of Frogtown Farm, a not-so-wild community urban farm in Saint Paul.[129] In my excitement, I completely spaced on the fact that Stinging Nettle has its name for a reason. The prickly sensation, culminating in a single drop of blood on my fingertip, hurt for a moment until it brought me back to myself, to the ground on which I stood.

I can see why, to Indigenous communities across Turtle Island, Stinging Nettle is an important teacher that instructs us to be more aware of our surroundings and conscientious of how we move through the world.[130] While I did not intend to harm the Nettle plant I encountered that day, I am grateful for the reminder that we sometimes do harm without knowing or meaning to. In such cases, a prickly confrontation is a kindness that shifts us into a more conscious awareness of how we affect others.

When it comes to engaging with plants, I'm learning that our unwieldy human presence can be jarring—it is important that we move with ease and introduce ourselves to the plant rather than assuming that we can just touch and take at our will.[131] Even if we all communicate differently, Stinging Nettle teach us that every living being has limitations and none of us can be pushed and prodded senselessly without our natural defense mechanisms taking hold. Like the stinging plant, we too must possess the courage it takes to be "ungovernable," to resist oppressive conditions—thorns and all.

### D. The "Wilderness"

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[127] Bringing us back to Shere Khan's character from the *The Jungle Book*
[128] As Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. once said, "A riot is the language of the unheard."
[129] Frogtown Farm. https://www.frogtownfarm.org/.
[130] "Wild Edibles: Stinging Nettle." OSU Extension Service. https://extension.oregonstate.edu/catalog/pub/em-9373-wild-edibles-stinging-nettle.
[131] I learned this too from Robin Wall Kimmerer's *Braiding Sweetgrass*

*“We need to foster an imaginary that understands the depths of time embodied in these plants, an imaginary that is outside the logic of origins and the oppressive boundaries of the state”* – Jumana Manna, “*Where Nature Ends and Settlements Begin”*

**“**Wilderness” is not a romanticized fantasy, an awe-inspiring getaway, a site of “protection,” or an “untouched” nature. “Wilderness” is neglect, the severance of more-than-human beings, who live in community alongside us, from the care and stewardship of their human relatives. Richard Bugbee from the Kumeyaay tribe of Southern California said: ”The biggest misconception is you take humans out of nature and nature comes back. That is not true. You take humans out of nature and there is something missing.”[132] Indigenous creation stories, which honor the role of humans in the extensive web of life, permeate every aspect of Indigenous livelihoods, including approaches to land management. Traditional ecological knowledge (TEK) holds true the invaluable role of humans in maintaining and managing the lands, stemming from the belief that, “if land is left in wilderness status, that is kin abandoning that land.”[133] The difference between these approaches is the relational component, the foundational understanding that there exists a mutual reciprocity between humans and nonhumans.

I recently watched the documentary film *Foragers,* directed by Jumana Manna, whose words I have quoted several times throughout my paper.[134] The film traces tensions between Palestinian foragers and the Israeli Nature & Parks Authority, illuminating the ways that settler government agencies weaponize “preservation” as a means of restricting Indigenous sovereignty. While the settler state of Israel seeks to construct a mythology of its own around these “wild” plants, ‘Akkoub and Za'atar testify to truths not even the settler state can bury. The unending care and stewardship of these two “weeds” by Palestinian foragers reminds us of the many forms anti colonial resistance can take and further, the interminable nature of our relationships to living beings that we cohabitate with wherein our sustenance depends on one another.

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[132] Kat Maier and Rosemary Gladstar. *Energetic herbalism: A guide to sacred plant traditions integrating elements of vitalism, ayurveda, and Chinese medicine*. Chelsea Green Publishing.
[133] Ibid
[134] Thank you Mizna for putting on a showing of this beautiful film.

Za'atar, also known as thyme, is an herb important to Palestinian culture and identity and most widely used for culinary purposes. It was also the first edible plant to be declared a "protected species"—in 1977, former Israeli prime minister Ariel Shanon made foraging and/or possessing Za'atar a criminal offense, punishable by steep fines and up to three years in prison.[135] This ban, enforced harshly and exclusively against the Arab population, directly targets Palestinian cultural identity at its source—the za'atar plant that provides sustenance to Palestinians.[136] Clearly, Indigenous relationships to land endanger the very heart of the settler colonial project, which must criminalize Indigenous stewardship practices as a means of preserving itself.

'Akkoub, a wild plant described as a cross between an asparagus and an artichoke is a treat to Palestinians but, "for those who did not grow up eating it, however, it is simply an irreverent thistle."[137] In this context, "weeds" are plants that we are not in relationship with, whose gifts are unfamiliar and so they are disregarded by us. Unlike za'atar, 'akkoub must be cleaned and cooked after it is harvested, which involves a hearty and meticulous process described by Manna as "a prickly passing of time."[138] A few decades later in 2005, 'akkoub joined za'atar and was, too, deemed illegal by the Israeli authorities. The science backing the law argued that the overharvesting 'akkoub causes dwindling growth of the plant in the "wild", but the theory of many Palestinians is that Israelis knew that "Arabs like it very much."[139]

Pervasive within settler colonial conservationist approaches is the notion that species' need to be left alone, protected *from* the stewardship of humans, especially Native peoples, whose caretaking of these plants for years and years is apparently to these plants' detriment. The "science" used to justify the criminalization of 'akkoub interaction reminded me of a chapter in Kimmerer's *Braiding Sweetgrass,* "Mishkos Kenomagwen: The Teachings of Grass" where one of her student's projects' challenges the (*assumed* to be true) claim made by Western science that harvesting a plant

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[135] Rabea Eghbariah, "The Struggle for Za'atar and 'Akkoub: Israel Nature Protection laws and Criminalization of Palestinian Herb-Picking Culture."
[136] Ibid
[137] Jumana Manna, "Where Nature Ends and Settlements Begin." https://www.e-flux.com/journal/113/360006/where-nature-ends-and-settlements-begin
[138] Ibid
[139] *Foragers,* Directed by Juamma Manna, 2022.

necessarily diminishes its output.[140] The results of her project found, to the contrary, that the unharvested areas of Sweetgrass were chock-full of dead stems while the harvested plots were thriving.[141] She explained that "humans participate in a symbiosis in which sweetgrass provides its fragrant blades to the people and people, by harvesting, create the conditions for sweetgrass to flourish" through compensatory growth.[142]

Though accentuated by scientific "expertise," these so-called conservation laws are, more than anything, the settler state's imposition of policies that restrict the agency of Indigenous peoples by essentially declaring them unfit to be self-sufficient. Regarding the bans on 'akkoub and za'atar, Manna writes, "these preservation laws constitute a thin ecological veil for racist legislation designed to further alienate Palestinians and Syrians in the occupied Golan Heights from their lands."[143] The criminalization of these traditional practices, under the guise of "preservation," reinforces preexisting colonial power relationships—the settler state controls the land and its resources while Native people are subject to its policies, intended to further dispossess them of their lands.

The resilient and enduring relationship between Palestinian foragers and "weeds" 'akkoub and za'atar is one we can all look to in maintaining intimate relationships with plant kin in the face of rupture, displacement, and shifting conditions. While Palestinian foragers' continue to be hit with heavy fines for engaging in the long withstanding tradition of picking za'atar or 'akkoub for their families, the act of foraging lives on, both an act of anticolonial resistance and an expression of life and perseverance in face of a ruthlessly oppressive settler colonial apparatus.

## III. Conclusion

While Western structures of domination are hell bent on destruction, "weeds" teach us that all living beings, human and other-than-human, resist erasure. The coalition of settler colonial empires who band together in pursuit of mass killing have all of the tools at their disposal—their police forces, their militaries, their tanks, their guns,

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[140] Robin Wall Kimmerer, *Braiding Sweetgrass.*
[141] Ibid
[142] Ibid
[143] Jumana Manna, "Where Nature Ends and Settlements Begin."
https://www.e-flux.com/journal/113/360006/where-nature-ends-and-settlements-begin

their missiles, their propaganda—but all in all, largely underestimate the will of living beings to survive, an instinct encoded in the genes of us all. With each attempt made to stifle their growth or eliminate them entirely, with each toxic herbicide applied to the spaces they inhabit, “weeds” grow more and more resistant—patterns etched into all us beings who possess a will to survive in and beyond settler colonial, capitalist society.

I draw from adrienne maree brown’s *Emergent Strategies* that no one and “nothing in nature is disposable.”[144] If we choose not to perpetuate cycles of harm and death, then no being is “irredeemable” and *all* are respected as worthy bearers of life. “Weeds” are the arbiters of ecological futures that can adapt to our shifting conditions and needs, that can ensure that all living beings are able to exist freely, knowing that they, too, are contributing something of value to inner workings of the whole.

To believe that “weeds”, despite their vilification, have goodness and are worthy of life is to believe that human beings, systematically degraded and criminalized, have goodness and are worthy of life, too. If we want to be agents of the futures we want to live in, we *must* be pesky nuisances to the oppressor, refusing to go away or obey the laws and ethics of States not concerned with life’s wellbeing on this planet.

As adrienne maree brown writes in *We Will not Cancel Us, and Other Dreams of Transformative Justice:* “The tools of swift and predatory justice feel good to us, familiar, groove in the hand easily from repeated training, briefly satisfying. But these tools are often blunt and senseless.”[145] Let’s apply this quote to the context of ‘weeds’ : we could easily pick up garden hoes, dig our hands into the soil, and get to work hacking away, ripping out plants that are harmful and ruthless invaders, (the colonizers, oppressors, reactionaries), destructive to the species they cohabitate with and the ecosystem as a whole and it might feel good, even cathartic. However, these tools are “blunt and senseless,” only “disposing of” these plants on the surface but keeping their deep roots intact from which they can inevitably continue their reign of destruction.

The colonizer’s tactics in dealing with these “weeds” prove that if we use these tools we doom ourselves to replicate these same cycles. Instead of the mindset of elimination and exclusion built into the settler colonial mindset, let us adopt a mindset of

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[144] adrienne maree brown. *Emergent strategy: Shaping change, changing worlds*. AK Press. .
[145] adrienne maree brown *We Will not Cancel Us and other Dreams of Transformative Justice*

prevention, or harm reduction. Let us ask ourselves what conditions we must create in order to make our spaces unwelcome to these harmful visitors, ask the creatures who live amongst us need, be intentional in how we move about the world. When absolutely necessary, let us cut off harm at its source, from where it is given life, and use its life-giving properties for good—to feed oneself and the community, to digest and recirculate its energy in service of the collective, to ensure that these plants do not continue to harm the species they cohabitate with.

This paper is merely a snapshot in time, an ongoing learning process that surely contains many contradictions and areas left unexplored. But in engaging with “weeds” in this format, I seek to address the cracks in academia, to introduce growth on the disturbed edges of what *can be* should we choose not to adhere to existing in strict accordance with the systems that seek to numb, pacify, and kill us along with all living beings inhabiting this Earth. I propose an alternative framework, one where we can not only live but thrive, one that begins and ends with solidarity between those of us most condemned, reviled, mistreated by the systems that would really prefer it if we all just went away. Just as ‘weeds’ proliferate despite attempts to destroy them, our existence is resistance, and whether we grow from a supplanted root or a seed strewn into the soil, our sprouts affirm futurities for peoples and land, interconnected. We must continue to live and grow in sustainable togetherness despite, despite, despite; repairing the scars that colonialism has left upon the land and blooming from the foundation’s cracks in assertion that life will continue to persist. While we (particularly settlers) are so ingrained with the colonial binaries that cloud our thinking and imagining, it is our responsibility to ourselves, our Indigenous relatives, and the stolen land we reside on to demand more than unlearning or an acknowledgement that we are occupying unceded Indigenous (Dakota) lands. Nothing less than complete decolonization is true justice, thus we must do the work of both dreaming and actively supporting the repatriation of Indigenous land and life, from Turtle Island to Palestine. Amidst the ruins grows the “weeds” of liberation.

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