

# Catastrophic Comparisons:



## International Relations Through Elsewhere

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# Declaration

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# Abstract

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*Catastrophic Comparisons: International Relations Through Elsewhere* is a study of comparisons in International Relations. Yet, it is not a comparative study in the conventional sense. This thesis is less concerned with using comparison as a particular technique of gathering, analyzing, and assessing information about the world than with understanding comparison as a way of intervening into that world. By excavating how and why people compare situations of political catastrophe, this thesis positions comparison as part of the equipment that actors in international relations draw upon in their worldly engagements.

To investigate how comparisons do not simply capture but intervene in international relations, this thesis is based upon an ethnography of comparisons. Through ethnographic fieldwork and interviews, it analyzes how Palestine becomes compared to other sites of political contestation, focusing specifically on Ireland, South Africa, and Turtle Island (an Indigenous name for “North America”). These places have historical linkages with the Palestinian movement, and the Palestinian experiences of occupation, settler-colonialism, and repression continue to resonate deeply today.

By studying the “catastrophic comparisons” that are drawn between these political contexts, this thesis argues that comparisons translate political experiences, (re)draw political relations, and (re)compose political issues in international relations. It traces the chains of matter and meaning that link everyday comparisons to the grander workings of international relations. Through comparison, Palestine becomes an amalgamation of heterogenous elements, a product of international multiplicity, composed of local trajectories as well as histories and futures elsewhere.

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# Contents

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<b>Illustrations .....</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>Abbreviations .....</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>Chapter 1 – Introduction: Catastrophic Comparisons .....</b>	<b>9</b>
Introduction.....	9
1. Everyday, Relational, and Creative Comparisons.....	11
2. Comparison as Catastrophic.....	14
3. Methodology .....	17
4. Contribution.....	19
5. Chapter Outline .....	21
<b>Chapter 2 – Acting Through Elsewhere: Reimagining Comparison .....</b>	<b>24</b>
Introduction.....	24
1. Reimagining Comparison .....	25
2. Translating Experiences .....	28
3. Drawing Relations .....	30
4. Composing Issues.....	33
Conclusion .....	36
<b>Chapter 3 – From the River over the Sea: Studying Comparisons to Palestine .....</b>	<b>38</b>
Introduction.....	38
1. From the River: The Palestinian Struggle .....	38
2. Over the Sea: Ireland, South Africa, Turtle Island.....	41
3. Research Methods: Participant Observation.....	43
4. Research Methods: Interviews .....	45
5. Ethical Commitments .....	48
6. Mode of Analysis .....	50
Conclusion .....	52
<b>Chapter 4 – A Proxy Palestine in Ireland: Comparability in Conflict .....</b>	<b>53</b>
Introduction.....	53
1. David and Goliath: Comparability between Ireland and Palestine.....	55
2. Speed Traps and Time Warps: Historical and Present-Day Comparisons .....	60
3. Connecting the Dots: The Trauma of the Troubles .....	62
4. Be Divided and Be Conquered: Complicity, Alienation, and the North-South Divide.....	67
5. Hibernia Irredenta: Reviving Republicanism and Reconnecting Ireland .....	71
Conclusion .....	76

<b>Chapter 5 – Revisiting the Ruins of Apartheid: Comparing South Africa and Palestine .....</b>	<b>77</b>
Introduction.....	77
1. Boycotts, Barriers, and Bantustans: Comparing South Africa and Palestine .....	79
2. Contested Comparisons: Challenging Apartheid Comparisons.....	86
3. The Ruins of Apartheid: Comparative Experiences in the Present.....	90
4. Comparison and Corruption: South Africa as a Warning Sign .....	93
5. From Ruins to Ruination: Reciprocal Comparisons .....	98
Conclusion .....	103
<b>Chapter 6 – From Turtle Island to Palestine: Comparative Indigenities .....</b>	<b>105</b>
Introduction.....	105
1. Comparing Corn and Olive Trees: Resonance Between Turtle Island and Palestine .....	109
2. From Palestine to the Pipeline: The Resurgence of Indigenous Resistance .....	113
3. Indigeneity and Failure: Tragic Fates and Hopeful Futures .....	118
4. Challenging Comparisons: Complicating Indigeneity and Settlerhood .....	122
5. Sacrifice Zones: Comparative Refusals .....	127
Conclusion .....	132
<b>Chapter 7 – Crafting Comparability: Composing Palestine .....</b>	<b>134</b>
Introduction.....	134
1. The Apartheid Analogy: Establishing Everyday Comparability.....	136
2. Apartheid Israel: Modifying the Grounds of Comparison .....	142
3. Indigenous Futures: The Original People of Palestine .....	147
4. Echoes of Ireland: Confronting Colonial Europe.....	153
5. Crafting (In)comparability: Composing Palestine .....	158
Conclusion .....	161
<b>Chapter 8 – Conclusion: International Relations Through Elsewhere .....</b>	<b>163</b>
Introduction.....	163
1. Findings .....	163
2. Contributions .....	167
3. Limitations and Future Research .....	171
4. Wider Significance .....	174
<b>Bibliography.....</b>	<b>176</b>
<b>Appendix .....</b>	<b>201</b>

## Illustrations

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Front page: Diana Roig. *Symphony for Catastrophe*. 2014. Oil painting on canvas.

## Abbreviations

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AbM	Abahlali baseMjondolo [Shack Dwellers' Movement]
AIM	American Indian Movement
ANC	African National Congress
BDS	Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions Movement
EFF	Economic Freedom Fighters
IAW	Israeli Apartheid Week
IPSC	Ireland Palestine Solidarity Campaign
IRA	Irish Republican Army
JVP	Jewish Voice for Peace
NCF	Negev Coexistence Forum for Civil Equality
PA	Palestinian Authority
PAA	Pueblo Action Alliance
PLO	Palestine Liberation Organization
PSA	Palestine Solidarity Alliance
PSC	Palestine Solidarity Campaign



# Chapter 1 – Introduction: Catastrophic Comparisons

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## Introduction

This thesis is concerned with comparisons in International Relations (IR). While it includes acts of comparison, it is not a comparative study in the conventional sense. In comparative research in and beyond International Relations, “comparison” tends to refer to the method performed by the researcher. Comparison is a structured technique for identifying similarities and differences between cases, often – but not always – with the aim of gauging the importance of one factor or another in space or time. In this sense, comparison offers the researcher an orderly way of gathering and analyzing information. This mode of comparison lies at the core of quantitative hypothesis testing as well as many modes of qualitative case study methodology in International Relations today.<sup>1</sup>

In this study, I am less concerned with using comparison as a particular technique of gathering, analyzing, and assessing information about the world than with understanding comparison as a way of intervening into that world. For this reason, this thesis can better be understood as a *study of comparisons* than as a comparative study. While comparison is already productively used to develop knowledge of international relations, I propose redirecting some attention to the uses and functions of comparison *within* international relations. Comparison is an elementary social and cognitive act. As a social act, comparison is a way of relating to things and beings by holding them together and contrasting them. Comparison, as a cognitive act, is central to encountering, confronting, and making sense of difference, internationally or otherwise. Therefore, as Isabelle Stengers writes, “we are all comparativists, and so probably are all animals.”<sup>2</sup> Perceiving comparison in this elementary way repositions comparison as important not only to our methods of study, but also to the everyday experiences of international relations. Comparisons then become part and parcel of international relations, as they allow us to make analogies, draw parallels and make judgments based on the distinctions between things.

I focus specifically on theorizing and examining how comparisons intervene in international relations. If International Relations is the study of the multiplicity of societies, species, and environments, comparison is an essential way of understanding, ordering, and mediating this multiplicity.<sup>3</sup> To understand how comparisons do not simply capture but constitute the international political world, this thesis adds to an established tradition of scholarship on the international politics of knowledge cultivation from a variety of poststructuralist, feminist/queer, post/decolonial, and new materialist traditions.<sup>4</sup> Scholars in this

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<sup>1</sup> E.g., Andrew Bennett and Colin Elman, "Case study methods in the international relations subfield," *Comparative Political Studies* 40, no. 2 (2007): 170-195; Tullia G. Falletti and James Mahoney, "The comparative sequential method," in *Advances in comparative-historical analysis*, ed. James Mahoney and Kathleen Thelen (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015): 211-239; Vincent Pouliot, "Practice tracing," in *Process tracing*, ed. Andrew Bennett and Jeffrey T. Checkel (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 237-259.

<sup>2</sup> Isabelle Stengers, "Comparison as a matter of concern," *Common Knowledge* 17, no. 1 (2011): 48.

<sup>3</sup> I take the notion of “multiplicity” from Justin Rosenberg, "International relations in the prison of political science," *International Relations* 30, no. 2 (2016): 127-153. I adapt it, however, to include not only societies but also species and environments, as inspired by Olaf Corry, "Nature and the international: towards a materialist understanding of societal multiplicity," *Globalizations* 17, no. 3 (2020): 419-435; Milja Kurki, "Multiplicity expanded: IR theories, multiplicity, and the potential of trans-disciplinary dialogue," *Globalizations* 17, no. 3 (2020): 560-575.

<sup>4</sup> Including, but not limited to: Bentley B. Allan, "From subjects to objects: Knowledge in International Relations theory," *European Journal of International Relations* 24, no. 4 (2018): 841-864; Richard K. Ashley and Rob BJ Walker, "Introduction: Speaking the language of exile: Dissident thought in international studies," *International Studies Quarterly* 34, no. 3 (1990): 259-268; Sanjay Seth, "Postcolonial theory and the critique of international relations," *Millennium* 40, no. 1 (2011): 167-183; Christine

field have argued that knowledge acts do not simply represent international relations but also shape those relations.<sup>5</sup> Through knowledge acts, visions of what international political life is and ought to be are enacted in concrete ways.<sup>6</sup> This thesis underlines this insight by theorizing how comparisons, as knowledge acts, constitute worldly engagements.

To do so, I position comparison not as an impartial technique for observing and analyzing international relations, but as a situated act that emerges through and intervenes in world politics. In so doing, I contribute to an expanding literature on how to conceive international relations in explicitly relational ways.<sup>7</sup> Relational modes of scholarship reorient the study of international relations away from things and their essences, towards the “multiple relations we are in and of.”<sup>8</sup> Rather than assuming the a-priori, fixed, separate, and stable existence of actors and things, relational scholars give analytic priority to their relational becoming.<sup>9</sup> When studying social forms and political realities, these are assumed to be always emergent and in-motion.<sup>10</sup> Comparative acts have rarely been theorized as part of the relational fabric of international relations. In this thesis, I provide a more expansive conception of comparison as a relational act. Through this relational conception, I underwrite the belief that “any approach foregrounding relations or the relational is aided by the recognition of the ways in which relations are spun out across comparative practices.”<sup>11</sup> Through this more expansive and relational reimagination, I position comparison as part of the equipment that all actors in international relations draw upon in their worldly engagements.

On the basis of this reimagination, I offer an empirical analysis of why actors in international relations compare and how their comparisons emerge through and shape the international political world. While I do draw some of my own comparisons, my main empirical focus is on engaging actors in international relations as active makers of comparison, rather than as objects to be compared. In other words, I aim to understand comparisons by entering the lifeworlds of those who create them. My engagement with these actors is somewhat different than commonly practiced in International Relations. In IR, as Christine Sylvester has argued, people tend to be studied “using someone else’s script, not their own, which might be a reason why IR is on the back foot when it comes to anticipating people as stakeholders, actors, and participants in international relations.”<sup>12</sup> In contrast, I move in between different modes of engagement, as I try to intimately understand my interlocutors’ comparisons whilst regularly taking a step back to analyze these comparisons as they emerge through and intervene in

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Sylvester, *Feminist theory and international relations in a postmodern era* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994); Karen Tucker, “Unraveling coloniality in international relations: Knowledge, relationality, and strategies for engagement,” *International Political Sociology* 12, no. 3 (2018): 215-232; Cynthia Weber, *Queer international relations: Sovereignty, sexuality and the will to knowledge* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016).

<sup>5</sup> E.g., Claudia Aradau and Jef Huysmans, “Critical methods in International Relations: The politics of techniques, devices and acts,” *European Journal of International Relations* 20, no. 3 (2014): 596-619.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> E.g., Emilian Kavalski, “Relational Theories in International Relations,” in *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of International Studies*, 31 January 2023, <https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780190846626.013.681>; Milja Kurki, “Relational revolution and relationality in IR: New conversations,” *Review of international studies* 48, no. 5 (2022): 821-836; Amaya Querejazu, “Cosmopraxis: Relational methods for a pluriversal IR,” *Review of International Studies* (2021): 1-16;

<sup>8</sup> Milja Kurki, *International Relations in a Relational Universe* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020).

<sup>9</sup> Tamara Trowsell, Amaya Querejazu Escobari, Giorgio Shani, Navnita Chadha Behera, Jarrad Reddekop, and Arlene Tickner, “Recrafting International Relations Through Relationality,” *E-International Relations*, 8 January 2019, <https://www.e-ir.info/2019/01/08/recrafting-international-relations-through-relationality/>.

<sup>10</sup> Julian Go and George Lawson, eds., *Global Historical Sociology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 23-27.

<sup>11</sup> Willem Schinkel, “Making climates comparable: Comparison in paleoclimatology,” *Social Studies of Science* 46, no. 3 (2016): 391.

<sup>12</sup> Christine Sylvester, “Experiencing the end and afterlives of International Relations/theory,” *European Journal of International Relations* 19, no. 3 (2013): 614.

international relations. In this way, I add to an emergent body of work on the ‘vernacular’ or ‘everyday’ dimensions of international relations, which focuses precisely on how international political life is in large measure created through everyday people, practices, and idioms.<sup>13</sup>

This introductory chapter further introduces the scaffolding of this study of comparisons. In the first section, I discuss the existing literature on comparison as an everyday, relational, and creative act, and situate my specific interventions. The second section substantiates the focus of this thesis on what I call “catastrophic comparisons.” Section three clarifies the contributions of this thesis, divided into conceptual, theoretical, methodological, and empirical contributions. In the fourth section, I introduce the “ethnography of comparison” as my methodological approach. The fifth and final section presents an overview of the following chapters.

## 1. Everyday, Relational, and Creative Comparisons

In studying how comparisons intervene in international relations, this thesis addresses three gaps in the literature. First, International Relations literatures have not yet paid significant attention to the everyday and informal uses of comparison. As indicated above, International Relations literatures have tended to conceive comparison as structured method performed by the researcher. In this sense, comparison is an intentional analytical act with a specific purpose and expected outcome. Yet, psychological literatures suggest that comparison is also a more everyday act that has a wide variety of uses. As a key element in the brain’s cognitive functioning, comparison can be traced back to the evolutionary need to protect oneself by being able to assess threats and opportunities.<sup>14</sup> For this reason, “comparison is an important part of any animal’s equipment for dealing with its respective world.”<sup>15</sup> Whether we are assessing a traffic situation or choosing which groceries to buy in the supermarket, comparison is a necessary element of our cognitive functioning. In similar ways, comparisons also structure the processes of contrasting and selecting within the conduct of international relations.

A rare study of how comparisons are used *within* international relations is undertaken by Yuen Foong Khong in “*Analogies at War: Korea, Munich, Dien Bien Phu, and the Vietnam Decisions of 1965.*” Khong looks at how and why policymakers use historical analogies in foreign policy decision-making, and with what implications.<sup>16</sup> Khong argues that comparisons play the greatest role during the selection and rejection of policy options. In this study, Khong remains focused on elite-level actors and the use of comparison as a form of deliberate analogical reasoning. Yet, psychological studies suggest that comparison is not only an intentional operation by certain actors but also a more widely used elementary mechanism for perceiving distinctions, which can be automatic, implicit, and subliminal.<sup>17</sup> Comparisons structure the creation of everyday

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<sup>13</sup> E.g., Michele Acuto, “Everyday international relations: Garbage, grand designs, and mundane matters,” *International Political Sociology* 8, no. 4 (2014): 345-362; Amanda Russell Beattie, Clara Eroukhmanoff, and Naomi Head, “Introduction: Interrogating the ‘everyday’ politics of emotions in international relations,” *Journal of International Political Theory* 15, no. 2 (2019): 136-147; Annika Björkdahl, Martin Hall, and Ted Svensson, “Everyday international relations: Editors’ introduction,” *Cooperation and Conflict* 54, no. 2 (2019): 123-130; Cynthia Enloe, “The mundane matters,” *International Political Sociology* 5, no. 4 (2011): 447-450; Xavier Guillaume, “The international as an everyday practice,” *International Political Sociology* 5, no. 4 (2011): 446; Xavier Guillaume and Jef Huysmans, “The concept of ‘the everyday’: Ephemeral politics and the abundance of life,” *Cooperation and Conflict* 54, no. 2 (2019): 278-296.

<sup>14</sup> Rebecca Webber, “The Comparison Trap,” *Psychology Today*, 7 November 2017, <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/articles/201711/the-comparison-trap>.

<sup>15</sup> Stengers, “Comparison as a matter of concern,” 48.

<sup>16</sup> Yuen Foong Khong, *Analogies at War, Korea, Munich, Dien Bien Phu, and the Vietnam Decisions of 1965* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992).

<sup>17</sup> E.g., Armand Chatard, Yvana Bocage-Barthélémy, Leila Selimbegović, and Serge Guimond, “The woman who wasn’t there: Converging evidence that subliminal social comparison affects self-evaluation,” *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology* 73 (2017): 1-

knowledge and can even remain below conscious awareness. Seeing comparison as an analytical act by particular actors, therefore, does not yet account for the multiplicity of everyday, subliminal, and informal ways in which acts of comparison shape international relations.

This project engages with literatures on everyday international relations to examine how comparisons translate political experiences. My focus is a bit broader than the analogy-oriented approach championed by Khong, in that this project centers comparisons that involve attention to both similarities as well as differences, and commonalities as well as contrasts. As we will see, this proves to be not only intellectually important but also politically productive. I explore how comparisons translate and thereby connect experiences that are conventionally seen as separated in place and time, taking part in different parts of the realm we tend to call “the international.” I use “translation” here in a wide sense, not only as the textual rewording of meaning, but in the establishment of equivalence between ideas, things, events, and feelings.<sup>18</sup> In so doing, I attend to the everyday and affective dimension of comparative acts, which, I show, are intimately connected. After all, “we see, smell, touch, and hear in the everyday and so it is naturally within this domain that a broader ecology of sensibility emerges with the potential to affect how we perceive, act upon, and feel about the world.”<sup>19</sup> As a constitutive part of this ecology of sensibility, I consider how comparisons translate experiences that occur below conscious awareness. This allows me to access comparison’s everyday and informal dimensions in international relations, and to understand the experiential ways in which times, places, and situations become connected through comparison.

Second, there has been little effort to explicitly assess the ways in which comparisons establish international political *relations*. While comparison, whether by scholars or actors in international relations, quite literally brings entities together to consider their similarities and/or differences, it has only rarely been acknowledged as a relational act in and of itself. The lack of attention to comparison as a relational act might be explained by the fact that comparison is often interpreted as and limited to a research method. In Global History, for example, comparative research methods have often become construed in opposition to relational or “entangled” modes of study.<sup>20</sup> Perhaps for this reason, relational theorists have not been concerned with studying comparison as a possible mode of relation in and of itself. A notable exception is Robbie Shilliam’s “*The Black Pacific: Anti-Colonial Struggles and Oceanic Connections*.”<sup>21</sup> Shilliam considers comparison to be one mode of connection spanning activists on both sides of the “Black Pacific.” Comparisons are here taken as relational acts, as Shilliam studies the ways in which Māori and Pasifika activists redraw race relations through comparisons to the Black Power movement in the USA. Yet, Shilliam discusses the uses and functions of comparison in establishing these relations only in passing. Furthermore, in light of the discussion on subliminal comparisons above, it is interesting to note that Shilliam positions comparison as “intellectual”

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13; Thomas Mussweiler, Katja Rüter, and Kai Epstude, “The man who wasn't there: Subliminal social comparison standards influence self-evaluation,” *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology* 40, no. 5 (2004): 689-696.

18 Jacqueline Best and William Walters, ““Actor-Network Theory” and international relationality: lost (and found) in translation: introduction,” *International Political Sociology* 7, no. 3 (2013): 333.

19 Jonathan Luke Austin, “Security compositions,” *European Journal of International Security* 4, no. 3 (2019): 260.

20 The reasoning is that the comparative method’s presupposes discrete and static units of analysis, which by definition cannot be related to one another. For the opposition between comparativism and relationality, see David Theo Goldberg, “Racial comparisons, relational racisms: Some thoughts on method,” *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 32, no. 7 (2009): 1271-1282; Natalia Molina, *How race is made in America: Immigration, citizenship, and the historical power of racial scripts* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2014); Michael Werner and Bénédicte Zimmermann, “Beyond Comparison: Histoire Croisée and the Challenge of Reflexivity,” *History and theory* 45, no. 1 (2006): 30-50.

21 Robbie Shilliam, *The Black Pacific: Anti-Colonial Struggles and Oceanic Connections* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2015).

and contrasts it with more “visceral and affective” modes of connection.<sup>22</sup> For Shilliam, comparison is therefore a relatively shallow mode of connection, with identification, inhabitation, and enfolding constituting possible “deeper” modes.<sup>23</sup> This does not yet capture the variety of ways in which comparisons can initiate and transform relations.

In this thesis, I connect the study of comparisons to debates on relationality in International Relations by analyzing how comparisons (re)draw relations. This means that I am concerned with analyzing comparison as part of the concrete, practical “work of putting *into relation* that which seems untied or unconnected.”<sup>24</sup> I am also interested in how existing relations are strengthened, transformed, or eroded through acts of comparison. I focus specifically on the drawing of relations that can be described as both “international” and “political.” Like Shilliam’s study of Māori and Pasifika activists and the American Black Power movement, this means that I focus on comparisons that are rooted in but also transcend national contexts and that emerge in the context of political struggles. The work of relating is always tied in with political choices about which relations matter and how they matter, whether these choices are made consciously or not.<sup>25</sup> I focus on the role of comparison in making these choices, studying the ways in which comparisons emerge from political relations and transform them, and in so doing, attend to the stakes and politics of comparisons in a relational way.

Third, debates have rarely considered how comparisons inform the creation of political issues in international relations. As a knowledge act, comparison allows us to make issues intelligible by reference to something, sometime, or somewhere else. International issues such as inequality or climate change, for example, cannot be made knowable and actionable without comparing levels of income or temperature. Very little attention has been paid, however, to how comparisons create the actual stuff of international relations. One explicit attempt at positioning comparison as integral to the subject matter of International Relations is undertaken by Thomas Müller, Mathias Alberts, and Kerrin Langer, who consider how comparative knowledge practices contribute to the ordering and structuring of international relations.<sup>26</sup> They focus specifically on how comparisons between nation-states contribute to the constitution of the so-called “balance of power” and how these comparisons are codified into institutionalized metrics on economic and military capabilities. Their analysis remains limited, however, to considerations of international order and comparisons on the level of the nation-state. Yet, they do argue for “a more general research agenda on the variety and effects of practices of comparison in world politics.”<sup>27</sup> Such a research agenda, in my view, would be most fruitful if it addresses how comparisons become built into the actual stuff of international relations. Across adjacent fields, such as anthropology, more sustained attention has been paid to how comparisons become ingrained into strategies of rule,<sup>28</sup> embedded into material objects,<sup>29</sup> and sedimented into

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<sup>22</sup> Shilliam, *The Black Pacific*, 46.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> Kathryn Yusoff, “Invisible worlds: Postrelational ethics, indeterminacy and the (k) notes of relating,” *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 31, no. 2 (2013): 212.

<sup>25</sup> Yusoff, “Invisible worlds,” 214.

<sup>26</sup> Thomas Müller, Mathias Albert, and Kerrin Langer, “Practices of comparison and the making of international orders,” *Journal of International Relations and Development* (2022): 1-26.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 5.

<sup>28</sup> Ann Laura Stoler, “Tense and tender ties: The politics of comparison in North American history and (post) colonial studies,” *The Journal of American History* 88, no. 3 (2001): 829-865.

<sup>29</sup> Gergely Mohácsi and Atsuro Morita, “Traveling comparisons: Ethnographic reflections on science and technology,” *East Asian Science, Technology and Society: An International Journal* 7, no. 2 (2013): 175-183.

landscapes.<sup>30</sup> By bringing these discussions into the international realm, we can start to grasp how comparisons not only evaluate but create issues in international relations.

In this thesis, therefore, I consider how comparisons (re)compose issues in international relations. I do so by drawing upon literatures on the relational composition of objects or issues in international relations, and by orienting this discussion to the role of comparisons in particular. In speaking of “composing”, I mobilize Bruno Latour’s meaning of the term as creating something, slowly and progressively, from heterogenous pieces.<sup>31</sup> Through comparison, heterogenous elements can be brought together to (re)compose a political issue. In the example of climate change, the issue is composed not only through temperature measurements, but also through the spatial and temporal comparison of climates, lifeforms, fossils, atmospheric compositions, energy sources, and human societies.<sup>32</sup> As Jonathan Luke Austin writes: “chains of meaning, from fragmented sensings of the world upward to entire theories, symphonies, or artworks, are what interests a compositional perspective: how we get from A to B, from fleeting experience to inscribed object.”<sup>33</sup> By focusing on the work of composition, I focus on chains of matter and meaning that link everyday comparisons to the formation of political issues in international relations. My interest here lies not in providing a bird’s eye perspective, but in showing the relational and fragmentary making and doing of international relations, in and through comparison.

## 2. Comparison as Catastrophic

My particular comparative focus of this study is what I call “catastrophic comparisons.” I use this notion less as a theoretical framework than as a sensibility and a heuristic to bring together the different ways in which comparisons intervene in international relations. While I continue the focus on catastrophe throughout this thesis, the term does not guide the empirical analysis in a conventional way. Instead, by speaking of comparisons as “catastrophic,” I hold together the three contributions of this thesis outlined above, based on three different readings of the term. First, I focus on comparisons made within the context of “catastrophic” situations, by which I refer to situations of disaster, conflict, oppression, and injustice. I interpret the word catastrophe here in its most literal sense, as a situation that causes great damage or suffering. These are situations that often shatter or irrevocably change the lives of those that experience them. The catastrophe is located not only in the physical destruction of lives and livelihoods, but also in its psychological aftermath. In that way, the trauma resulting from such a situation can in itself also be described as “catastrophic.”<sup>34</sup>

In analyzing how comparisons translate political experiences, I concentrate in particular on experiences of catastrophic situations. All comparisons studied in this thesis revolve, in one way or another, around what Palestinians have called the ‘*Nakba*’ (catastrophe). This term is used to describe the earth-shattering events of 1948 whereby Palestinian villages and towns were destroyed and more than half of all Palestinians were uprooted from their homes and displaced, paving the way for the establishment of the state of Israel. Palestinians tend to consider the

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<sup>30</sup> Heather Anne Swanson, "Landscapes, by comparison," in *The World Multiple: The Quotidian Politics of Knowing and Generating Entangled Worlds*, ed. Kei'ichi Omura, Grant Otsuki, Shiho Satsuka, and Atsuro Morita (London: Routledge, 2018), 105-122.

<sup>31</sup> Bruno Latour, "An attempt at a" compositionist manifesto", *New literary history* 41, no. 3 (2010): 471-490.

<sup>32</sup> As shown by Schinkel, "Making climates comparable," 374-395.

<sup>33</sup> Jonathan Luke Austin, "A parasitic critique for international relations," *International Political Sociology* 13, no. 2 (2019): 215-231.

<sup>34</sup> Robert D. Stolorow, *Trauma and human existence: Autobiographical, psychoanalytic, and philosophical reflections* (London: Routledge, 2011).

catastrophe of the Nakba to be still ongoing, as, in Palestinian poet Mahmoud Darwish's words, "an extended present that continues into the future."<sup>35</sup> As underlined by Palestinian scholars, the Nakba continues to manifest in the continued suppression, dispossession, and displacement of Palestinians today.<sup>36</sup>

I focus specifically on how people in other situations that can be described as catastrophic compare their own experiences to Palestine and vice versa. To do so, I analyze comparisons to other catastrophic situations in Ireland, South Africa, and Turtle Island (an Indigenous name for "North America"). Like the reality of Palestine, these situations can be traced back to what Elizabeth A. Povinelli has called "the ancestral catastrophe of colonialism," as they all emerge out of processes of settler-colonialism.<sup>37</sup> Through comparison, experiences of these situations can be translated into the present, and I study how this is done in different ways between Palestine and these three other contexts. I engage with comparisons made by activists, scholars, policy makers, religious leaders, and others who compare these political situations. My focus is not only on the verbal comparisons made by my interlocutors, but also on the ways in which events elsewhere resonate with them in more sensory and affective ways. By bringing together everyday comparisons, I gauge how they translate experiences internationally.

Second, I engage with comparisons as having 'catastrophic' qualities in and of themselves. In this understanding, something is catastrophic when it confronts our deeply held beliefs about ourselves and/or the world. An encounter with alterity, with someone or something else, can be catastrophic. The catastrophe is then not so much an overwhelming outside occurrence, but rather something that happens within and between subjects. In Mikhail Bakhtin's words: "catastrophe is not finalization. It is the culmination, in collision and struggle, of points of view (of equally privileged consciousnesses, each with its own world). Catastrophe does not give these points of view resolution, but on the contrary reveals their incapability of resolution under earthly conditions."<sup>38</sup> In this sense, catastrophe emerges through the relational and unpredictable encounter between different lifeworlds and viewpoints. Julia Gallagher has brought this understanding of catastrophe into debates in International Relations. To Gallagher, research encounters can be 'catastrophic,' as they 'force on us realizations of differences or similarities that do not conform to our preconceptions.'<sup>39</sup> The catastrophic aspects of these encounters are most illuminating when they force people "into a re-evaluation not only of their conceptions of the 'other' but of themselves too."<sup>40</sup>

In this thesis, I study how comparisons can be catastrophic in a relational sense. For my interlocutors in Ireland, South Africa, Turtle Island, and Palestine, the comparison often hits close to home. Comparisons can make them see elements of their own situation in a different light or clarify the wider dynamics out of which these situations emerge. As my interlocutors' stories convey, comparison can deliver what Rita Felski calls a "jolt to consciousness" by

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<sup>35</sup> Mahmoud Darwish, "Not to begin at the end," *Al-Ahram Weekly*, 10-16 May 2001, <https://wsarch.ucr.edu/wsnmail/2001/msg00806.html>.

<sup>36</sup> Rana Barakat, "Writing/righting Palestine studies: settler colonialism, indigenous sovereignty and resisting the ghost (s) of history," *Settler colonial studies* 8, no. 3 (2018): 349-363; Omar Jabary Salamanca, Mezna Qato, Kareem Rabie, and Sobhi Samour, "Past is present: Settler colonialism in Palestine," *Settler Colonial Studies* 2, no. 1 (2012): 1-8.

<sup>37</sup> Elizabeth A. Povinelli, *Between Gaia and ground: Four axioms of existence and the ancestral catastrophe of late liberalism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2021).

<sup>38</sup> Mikhail Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1984), 298.

<sup>39</sup> Julia Gallagher, "Interviews as catastrophic encounters: an object relations methodology for IR research," *International Studies Perspectives* 17, no. 4 (2016): 445-461.

<sup>40</sup> Gallagher, "Interviews as catastrophic encounters," 447.

reorganizing one's own experience in relation to "alternate ways of conceiving or inhabiting the world."<sup>41</sup> As a relational phenomenon, comparison can then be understood as "something that comes upon and constitutes the reflective self rather than something that it wills or decides to do."<sup>42</sup> To this end, I am not so much concerned with judging whether the comparisons my interlocutors draw are appropriate, but rather with understanding the embeddedness and function of their comparisons within relational configurations. In a more collective sense, the catastrophic nature of a comparison with someone, somewhere, or something else, can recast and create concrete political relations. I show that as relational acts, comparisons are sometimes able to grow into sustained political movements. Whether these movements are focused on a political situation elsewhere or turn the gaze inwards, this thesis focuses on how they emerge from the relational qualities of acts of comparison.

Third, I draw on the meaning of "catastrophic" as something potentially creative and transformative. Claudia Aradau and Rens van Munster trace the genealogy of the contemporary concept of "catastrophe" back to the nineteenth century, when it referred to a moment of dramatic action in theatre.<sup>43</sup> While the term later became synonymous with disaster and accident, it retained its notion of "overturning." In this sense, catastrophes are unexpected and unforeseen, not necessarily in adverse, but also in generative and hopeful ways. As Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari describe: "Painters go through a catastrophe ... and leave the trace of this passage on the canvas, as of the leap that leads them from chaos to composition."<sup>44</sup> Rather than a disaster or an undoing, catastrophe thus becomes a productive subversion of order and systematicity. As Frédéric Neyrat writes: "Like the collapse of a river's bed or artificial dykes, a catastrophe carries away with it instituted orders, habits and habitations, ways of life, sometimes delusions."<sup>45</sup> Catastrophe describes an encounter with the chaos and irregularity that results from the loss of order, out of which many possibilities can arise. While a catastrophe thus remains unsettling, it is not so much a destructive end point as a stage on the way to creation.

This thesis, therefore, focuses on comparisons that are catastrophic in that they create new possibilities in international relations. I am concerned with how comparisons (re)compose issues in international relations, with a particular focus on the issue of Palestine and its relations to issues in Ireland, South Africa, and Turtle Island. Through comparison, visions, vocabularies, and networks are transported internationally, which inform how an issue such as Palestine can become known and acted upon. This can be understood as catastrophic, given that it provides creative possibilities, for example for the Palestinian present and future. Comparison can, in this sense, be a catalyst for change as it can "shock us into new ways of seeing the world."<sup>46</sup> As Benedict Anderson states: "the most instructive comparisons (whether of difference or similarity) are those that surprise."<sup>47</sup> While not all comparisons I discuss are necessarily surprising, I consider their creative effects as they are folded together and (re)composed into possible political futures.

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<sup>41</sup> Rita Felski, "Comparison and translation: a perspective from actor-network theory," *Comparative Literature Studies* 53, no. 4 (2016): 754-755.

<sup>42</sup> Pheng Cheah, "The material world of comparison," *New Literary History* 40, no. 3 (2009): 535.

<sup>43</sup> Claudia Aradau and Rens Van Munster, *Politics of catastrophe: genealogies of the unknown* (London: Routledge, 2011), 6.

<sup>44</sup> Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *What is philosophy?* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), 203.

<sup>45</sup> Frédéric Neyrat, "The biopolitics of catastrophe, or how to avert the past and regulate the future," *South Atlantic Quarterly* 115, no. 2 (2016): 247-265.

<sup>46</sup> Jacob Edmond, "No discipline: An introduction to "The indiscipline of comparison,"" *Comparative Literature Studies* 53, no. 4 (2016): 650.

<sup>47</sup> Benedict Anderson, *A Life beyond Boundaries* (London: Verso, 2016), 130.



### 3. Methodology

In terms of methodology, this thesis can be read as an ethnography of comparisons. This methodological approach, introduced by Timothy Choy, juxtaposes and draws relations between acts of comparison, including those made by everyday people.<sup>48</sup> This approach is suited to my research aims as it engages with comparisons made by others while making explicit “the stakes and politics that attend particular lines of comparative thinking.”<sup>49</sup> In my interpretation, this entails understanding comparisons on their own terms, whilst frequently taking a step back to analyze how they intervene in wider international relations. In further introducing how I interpret this methodological approach, I follow Patrick Thaddeus Jackson in distinguishing “methods,” as the concrete tools used to do research from “methodology,” which is the overall structure and strategy underlying research.<sup>50</sup> While I discuss my research methods and concrete research choices in Chapter 3, this section clarifies the underlying research methodology.

I consider an ethnographic methodology best suited to my research as it comes closest to recreating “the dramatic milieu of everyday experience.”<sup>51</sup> Ethnographic scholarship is often credited for diversifying knowledges in International Relations by taking an active interest in the experiences and perspectives of everyday actors.<sup>52</sup> It focuses on international relations as they are lived, and provides “a sense of openness” by allowing scholars to see, hear, taste, and feel “what goes on beyond the world of spoken and written word.”<sup>53</sup> Even as ethnography is concerned with everyday action, it should not be taken as a vehicle to produce an immediate and accurate account of the “really real.”<sup>54</sup> While ethnography is sometimes heralded as producing an “authentic” account of people’s lifeworlds, any ethnographer’s account of these lifeworlds is necessarily partial.<sup>55</sup> Yet, it is precisely in its partial and located perspective that its possibility lies, as this allows for a power-sensitive account, which is cognizant of other lifeworlds.<sup>56</sup>

Ethnography is “an exercise in being truthful about the distance we travel from research questions to finished manuscript, with all its doubts, epiphanies, and improvisations.”<sup>57</sup> In most discussions of research methodology, we are told to “to tidy our texts, not to reveal the struggle we have in getting somewhere.”<sup>58</sup> Instead, by taking an ethnographic approach, I write my surprises, mistakes, and intuitions into the empirical analysis. This is part of ethnography’s political and ethical commitment to recognizing research as a power-laden claim to authority in itself.<sup>59</sup> My approach to considering my bodily experiences of doubt or insecurity as part of the research process is thereby also motivated by my endeavor to “unmaster research,” as I have

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<sup>48</sup> Timothy Choy, *Ecologies of Comparison: An Ethnography of Endangerment in Hong Kong* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011).

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, 6-7.

<sup>50</sup> Patrick Thaddeus Jackson, *The conduct of inquiry in international relations: Philosophy of science and its implications for the study of world politics* (London: Routledge, 2016), 25.

<sup>51</sup> Wanda Vrasti, “Dr Strangelove, or how I learned to stop worrying about methodology and love writing,” *Millennium* 39, no. 1 (2010): 86.

<sup>52</sup> E.g., Sarah Biecker and Klaus Schlichte, eds., *The Political Anthropology of Internationalized Politics* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2021); Noelle Brigden and Ćetta Mainwaring, “Subversive Knowledge in Times of Global Political Crisis: A Manifesto for Ethnography in the Study of International Relations,” *International Studies Perspectives* 23, no. 2 (2022): 199.

<sup>53</sup> Jon Harald Sande Lie, “Challenging Anthropology: Anthropological Reflections on the Ethnographic Turn in International Relations,” *Millennium* 41, no. 2 (2013): 202.

<sup>54</sup> Ruth Behar, “Ethnography and the book that was lost,” *Ethnography* 4, no. 1 (2003): 16.

<sup>55</sup> Vrasti, Wanda, “The strange case of ethnography and international relations,” *Millennium* 37, no. 2 (2008): 279-301.

<sup>56</sup> Donna Haraway, “Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective,” *Feminist Studies* 14, no. 3 (1988): 575-599.

<sup>57</sup> Vrasti, “Dr Strangelove,” 79.

<sup>58</sup> Sara Ahmed, *Living a Feminist Life* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2017), 13.

<sup>59</sup> Vrasti, “Dr Strangelove.”

described it elsewhere.<sup>60</sup> By challenging my own position as the knowing researcher, I intend to carve out a space for other knowers and knowledges in the process of research.<sup>61</sup> An ethnographic methodology that allows me to express how I am moved by others in the process of knowing fulfils my aim of doing research by not-quite-knowing or knowing together, which I argue offers more creative, insightful and cooperative ways of grasping the world.<sup>62</sup>

Most importantly, ethnography offers “a participatory and dynamic approach to social reality along with an accessible and dramatic way of communicating that reality.”<sup>63</sup> My writing style in the empirical analysis is intended to reflect my commitment to accessible and engaging writing. In the empirical chapters, the ethnography unfolds through weaving together stories of people and their comparisons, times and places. I am inspired here by the recent turn to narrative and creative writing in International Relations.<sup>64</sup> While my account is in no way fictionalized, I do intend for the reader to get to know my interlocutors almost as characters in a novel. To care for and feel with them, as I share (parts of) their stories. This strengthens my attempt to unmaster research, as narrative scholarship asks the reader to enter into a more dialogic relationship with the text.<sup>65</sup> While my account can only be considered as a narrative in a limited sense, as I move back and forth between different modes of engagement including more analytical reflection, it does provide openings for the reader to respond to and weigh different accounts and possibilities. As Paulo Ravecca and Elizabeth Dauphinee argue, forms of narrative scholarship can also carry multiple messages and contradictions.<sup>66</sup> This enhances my study since the comparisons discussed are often contradictory yet intervene in international relations at the very same time. By presenting these comparisons through the lifeworlds and stories of my interlocutors, I am able to hold them together for multilayered interpretation without deciding which of them is “right.” In turning to a limited mode of narrative scholarship in this thesis, however, my hope is above all that it makes for a pleasant reading experience.

In terms of my ethnographic activities, my approach comes closest to what Anna Tsing calls a “patchwork ethnography.”<sup>67</sup> A patchwork ethnography is based upon shorter-term field visits, online research, and the more fragmentary collection of information.<sup>68</sup> While ethnographic analysis has traditionally been stooled on long-term immersion in one, often “foreign,” locale, patchwork ethnography blurs the boundaries between “home” and the “field.” Its emergence reflects shifting ideas on the conduct of ethnographic research within everyday life itself. The interest in patchwork ethnography responds to pressing concerns about ethnographic work, for example related to the access and cost of doing fieldwork, researchers’ work-life balance and the environmental impact of travel.<sup>69</sup> In my own case, it formed a way of continuing my research

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<sup>60</sup> Enrike van Wingerden, “Unmastering research: positionality and intercorporeal vulnerability in international studies,” *International Political Sociology* 16, no 2. (2022).

<sup>61</sup> Ibid.

<sup>62</sup> Jack J. Halberstam, *The Queer Art of Failure* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011), 2-3.

<sup>63</sup> Vrasti, “Dr Strangelove,” 85.

<sup>64</sup> Megan D. Daigle, *From Cuba with love: Sex and money in the twenty-first century* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2015); Elizabeth Dauphinee, *The Politics of Exile* (London: Routledge, 2013); Naeem Inayatullah and Elizabeth Dauphinee, *Narrative global politics: Theory, history and the personal in international relations* (London: Routledge, 2016); Oded Löwenheim, *Politics of the Trail* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2012).

<sup>65</sup> Paulo Ravecca and Elizabeth Dauphinee, “Narrative and the Possibilities for Scholarship,” *International Political Sociology* 12, no. 2 (2018): 126

<sup>66</sup> Ibid., 136.

<sup>67</sup> Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing, *Friction: An ethnography of global connection* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011), x-xi.

<sup>68</sup> Gökçe Günel, Saiba Varma, and Chika Watanabe, “A Manifesto for Patchwork Ethnography,” *Society for Cultural Anthropology*, 9 June 2020, <https://culanth.org/fieldsights/a-manifesto-for-patchwork-ethnography>.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid.

despite the debilitating changes in my own (and our collective) everyday circumstances in the Covid-19 pandemic. Patchwork ethnography allowed me to shift and shape my research in the context of pandemic-related mobility restrictions and health concerns, without compromising the political and ethical commitments that characterize ethnographic fieldwork.<sup>70</sup>

While this thesis initially became a patchwork ethnography because of its concrete circumstances, the patched nature of this mode of research proves to be well attuned to its compositional focus. Because this thesis is concerned with comparisons as they emerge in different sites, the ethnography was always intended to be conducted on a multi-sited basis. This includes sites in Ireland, South Africa, Turtle Island, and Palestine introduced in Chapter 3. Yet, by shifting and shortening the fieldwork visits, and including more online research than I expected, I have been able to consider and respond to recent transformations in how the issue of Palestine has become known, acted upon, and composed. Given the very real constraints and challenges in conducting a fieldwork-based research project in times of Covid-19, the patchwork ethnography allows me to weave all the obstacles and transformations, both in my own life and those of my interlocutors, into the text, composing it gradually and interruptedly, like international political life itself.

#### 4. Contribution

As a study of comparisons in international relations, this thesis makes conceptual, theoretical, methodological, and empirical contributions. Conceptually, this thesis reimagines comparison as “acting through elsewhere,” developed in Chapter 2. This expansive, relational reimagining of comparison encompasses comparative ways of gathering, analyzing, and assessing information as well as more everyday comparisons. By identifying comparisons as knowledge acts made all kinds of actors in the everyday arenas of international political life, it becomes possible to observe the centrality of comparison within both the study and the conduct of international relations. Thereby, this conceptual reimagining allows for more diversified engagements with comparison in International Relations. By reimagining comparison as a relational act, this thesis paves the way for the development of explicitly relational ways of practicing and studying comparison. In so doing, this conceptual imagination can lay the basis for a renewed comparativism in International Relations, one that is not strictly beholden to the assumptions of conventional comparative study.

Theoretically, this thesis makes the argument that comparisons intervene in international relations. This argument contributes to ongoing debates on the international politics of knowledge cultivation. In the past decade or so, these debates have started to focus on how knowledge acts shape international relations, particularly by focusing on how research methods carry political visions that have real-world effects.<sup>71</sup> As mentioned above, international relations scholars have argued that research methods partake in the enactment of political realities.<sup>72</sup> Inspired by new materialist and practice-oriented approaches, international relations scholars started to pay more attention to the concrete and practical work of world-making.<sup>73</sup> This thesis

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<sup>70</sup> Ibid.

<sup>71</sup> Aradau and Huysmans, "Critical methods in International Relations," 596-619; Wendy Harcourt, L. H. M. Ling, Marysia Zalewski, and Swiss International Relations Collective (Elisabeth Prügl, Rahel Kunz, Jonas Hagmann, Xavier Guillaume and Jean-Christophe Graz), "Assessing, engaging, and enacting worlds: Tensions in feminist method/ologies," *International Feminist Journal of Politics* 17, no. 1 (2015): 158-172.

<sup>72</sup> Aradau and Huysmans, "Critical methods in International Relations."

<sup>73</sup> E.g., Christian Bueger and Frank Gadinger, *International practice theory* (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018); William E. Connolly, *The fragility of things: Self-organizing processes, neoliberal fantasies, and democratic activism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2013).

adds to this body of work by theorizing how comparisons, as more everyday knowledge acts, are actively involved in world-making by translating political experiences, (re)drawing political relations, and (re)composing political issues.

Methodologically, this thesis engages with others as active makers of comparison. I position this ethnography of comparison as a contribution to the field of everyday international relations, where scholars have called for “novel methodologies” for the study of the everyday.<sup>74</sup> Against the “methodological elitism” of most studies of international relations, I build my methodology around comparative acts made by all kinds of everyday people.<sup>75</sup> Importantly, I use this approach not only to say something about the lives and views of those particular people, but to show the constitutive role their comparisons, as knowledge acts, play in the making of international relations. The thoughts and acts of everyday people are not often assumed to influence the grander workings of international relations. As John M. Hobson and Leonard Seabrooke write, “it is as if elite actors or international institutions write the script, which everyday actors receive in a passive way.”<sup>76</sup> My proposed way of engaging everyday people as makers of comparison is meant to erode any clear-cut methodological distinction between “micro” and “macro” politics.<sup>77</sup> The point here is to understand situated events or experiences within the larger heterogenous and fluid structure of which they are a part.<sup>78</sup> This thesis takes comparative acts seriously in the widest possible sense as they make their way into political issues.

I also challenge ways of thinking about methodology by interrogating the distinction between knowledge acts made by me and those made by my interlocutors. In recent years, there is an increasing interest in developing more horizontal and reciprocal modes of research, for example by acknowledging the contribution of collaborators or through explicitly participatory research methodologies.<sup>79</sup> These developments are important as they can disrupt the often hierarchical and extractive relationships between knowing researchers and research participants.<sup>80</sup> In this study, I share the same aim, but take a different route. In my empirical analysis, I place comparative acts by scholars (including myself) and other everyday people on a similar footing and study them side by side. This methodological approach is intended not to undermine the productive use of comparative research methods, nor to deny that scholarly modes of comparing have specific strengths in terms of gathering, analyzing, and quantifying information, but to reimagine all those comparative acts as worldly interventions. In so doing, I reposition the scholar as one among many makers of comparison in international relations and contribute to more horizontal ways of thinking about research methodology.

Empirically, this thesis forms a study of the making of Palestine, in and through what I call catastrophic comparisons. As I further substantiate and historicize in Chapter 3, the issue of Palestine forms a suitable focal point for this study because it is a frequent subject of international comparison. Through my empirical study, I add to an existing body of literature on

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<sup>74</sup> Björkdahl, Hall, and Svensson, “Everyday international relations,” 124.

<sup>75</sup> Liam Stanley and Richard Jackson, “Introduction: Everyday narratives in world politics,” *Politics* 36, no. 3 (2016): 223-235.

<sup>76</sup> John M. Hobson and Leonard Seabrooke, *Everyday Politics of the World Economy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 1.

<sup>77</sup> Linda Åhäll, “Feeling everyday IR: Embodied, affective, militarising movement as choreography of war,” *Cooperation and Conflict* 54, no. 2 (2019): 150; Ty Solomon and Brent J. Steele, “Micro-moves in international relations theory,” *European Journal of International Relations* 23, no. 2 (2017): 267-291.

<sup>78</sup> For a theorization of structure in a more heterogenous way, see Jef Huysmans and Joao P. Nogueira, “International Political Sociology as a Mode of Critique: Fracturing Totalities,” *International Political Sociology* 15, no. 1 (2021).

<sup>79</sup> Matthew Brown and Karen Tucker, “Unconsented sterilisation, participatory story-telling, and digital counter-memory in Peru,” *Antipode* 49, no. 5 (2017): 1186-1203.

<sup>80</sup> Tucker, “Unraveling Coloniality in International Relations,” 226.

how Palestine is (or should be) compared to other international contexts, including studies that already center on comparisons with Ireland,<sup>81</sup> South Africa,<sup>82</sup> and Turtle Island.<sup>83</sup> I contribute to this literature not by adding my own comparative perspective, but by showing the politics of various comparative positionings through a focus on everyday practice. My empirical analysis of these comparisons is not entirely symmetrical, in that my interlocutors in Ireland, South Africa, and Turtle Island tend to draw comparisons *to* Palestine, but that the existence of comparisons *from* Palestine to those other contexts is sometimes more limited. This focus reflects the asymmetrical empirical reality: Because the settler-colonization of Palestine is ongoing in an overt way, there is more of a sustained involvement in Palestine from these different contexts than the other way around. This is not to say that Ireland, South Africa, and Turtle Island are no longer settler-colonial contexts, nor that there is no strong support for issues there *from* Palestine, as I show in the empirical analysis. Rather, it underlines the present-day importance of Palestine as an issue within international relations.

## 5. Chapter Outline

This thesis unfolds in eight chapters. Following this introductory chapter, it contains a theoretical chapter, a methodological chapter, four empirical chapters, and a concluding chapter.

Chapter 2, “Acting Through Elsewhere: Reimagining Comparison” presents the theoretical contribution of this thesis. It provides a more expansive theoretical view of comparison for International Relations, reimagined as modes of “thinking and acting through elsewhere.” It theorizes three ways in which comparisons intervene in international relations. First, it conceptualizes the role of comparisons in translating everyday and subliminal experiences, based on a theorization of “translation” and “resonance.” Second, it positions comparison as a mode of relation-drawing by drawing on relational conceptions of similarity and difference. Third, it theorizes how acts of comparison contribute to the composition of issues in international relations based on compositional theory.

Chapter 3, “From the River Over the Sea: Studying Comparisons to Palestine” lays the methodological groundwork for this ethnography of comparisons by elaborating on the research choices on which it is based. It introduces the history of the Palestinian struggle for liberation the emergence of international comparisons to Palestine as the selected focal point of this study. It presents the selected research sites in Ireland, South Africa, Turtle Island, and Palestine, and discusses fieldwork practices, interview strategies, analytical steps, and the ethical challenges that emerged along the way. It establishes the mode of research as one that is intended to allow the reader to inhabit the various acts of comparison, not only analytically, but emotionally too.

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<sup>81</sup> E.g., Donald H. Akenson, *God's Peoples: Covenant and Land in South Africa, Israel, and Ulster* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1992); Ian Lustick, *Unsettled States, Disputed Lands: Britain and Ireland, France and Algeria, Israel and the West Bank-Gaza* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993); Thomas G. Mitchell, *Native vs. Settler: Ethnic Conflict in Israel/Palestine, Northern Ireland, and South Africa* (Westport: Praeger Publishers, 2000); Benjamin Gidron, Stanley N. Katz, and Yeheskel Hasenfeld, eds., *Mobilizing for Peace: Conflict Resolution in Northern Ireland, Israel/Palestine, and South Africa* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002).

<sup>82</sup> E.g., Abigail B. Bakan and Yasmeen Abu-Laban, "Israel/Palestine, South Africa and the 'one-state solution': the case for an apartheid analysis," *Politikon* 37, no. 2-3 (2010): 331-351; Uri Davis, *Apartheid Israel: possibilities for the struggle within* (London: Zed Books, 2003); Ilan Pappé, ed., *Israel and South Africa: The many faces of apartheid* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2015); Julie Peteet, "The work of comparison: Israel/Palestine and Apartheid," *Anthropological Quarterly* (2016): 247-281.

<sup>83</sup> E.g., Chandni Desai, "Disrupting settler-colonial capitalism: Indigenous intifadas and resurgent solidarity from Turtle Island to Palestine." *Journal of Palestine Studies* 50, no. 2 (2021): 43-66; Mike Krebs and Dana M. Olwan, "'From Jerusalem to the grand river, our struggles are one': Challenging Canadian and Israeli settler colonialism," *Settler Colonial Studies* 2, no. 2 (2012): 138-164; Steven Salaita, *Inter/nationalism: decolonizing native America and Palestine* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2016); Linda Tabar and Chandni Desai, "Decolonization is a global project: From Palestine to the Americas," *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education & Society* 6, no. 1 (2017).

Chapter 4, “A Proxy Palestine in Ireland: Comparability in Conflict” identifies how comparability with Palestine is crafted in present-day Ireland. It discusses how the historical experiences of settler-colonialism, occupation, and eventual partition are mobilized in comparisons with Palestine, and how protest tactics of boycotts and hunger strikes take shape comparatively. The chapter explores and problematizes the contrast that is created between Ireland as mostly a historical struggle and Palestine as a present-day one, by considering how comparisons continue to be lived and felt in Irish today. It takes seriously the emotional, visceral, and involuntary connections to Palestine, and how they are connected to the current political situation in Ireland. It also makes the argument that the way in which events in Palestine resonate with lived experiences differs for those in North and in the South of Ireland, and that these differences are also reified through how comparisons are construed. Finally, it zooms in on the ways in which comparisons with Palestine functions as conduits through which Southern and Northern can become translated and reconnected, especially in the context of a seeming “peace.”

Chapter 5, “Revisiting the Ruins of Apartheid: Comparing South Africa and Palestine” examines how apartheid analogies between Palestine and South Africa are established through the historical experiences of forced removal, separation, and humiliation. It also fractures this familiar story, however, by questioning how these comparisons have become contested in present-day South Africa. The chapter discusses how resonance with Palestine takes shape across different religious registers, racialized communities, and age groups today. It then deepens the understanding of how comparisons with Palestine resonate through the so-called “ruins of apartheid.” Rather than positioning apartheid as a relic of the past, I argue that the ruinous legacies of the apartheid era are actively continued in present-day South Africa. Therefore, the politics of present form new modes of resonance with lived realities you would find in Palestine. I discuss how South Africa is usually positioned as a model for Palestinians or as a warning sign, but also present new modes of comparability which connect both contexts on a more reciprocal basis, revealing how they emerge out of wider international relations of race and capital.

Chapter 6, “From Turtle Island to Palestine: Comparative Indigenities” explores how experiences of settler colonialism Palestine resonate in Turtle Island. It centers the subliminal nature of these comparisons, which is felt by Indigenous people visiting Palestine, as well as within the Palestinian diaspora in Turtle Island. The chapter shows that the comparison with Palestine gains particular meanings within the current resurgence of Indigenous resistance, by focusing on particular moments of Native resistance in which comparability with Palestine has become crafted in more explicit terms. While the fate of Indigenous peoples in Turtle Island has sometimes become construed as a failure or as a possible bleak future for Palestine, this chapter shows that it is in these moments that a more active, resistant, and ongoing understanding of Indigenous struggle is put to practice. This is a contested process, which depends on ongoing discussions of what it means to be Indigenous (or a settler) in the first place. While the terms of the comparison are still debated, Indigenous organizers are claiming their identity, asserting their sovereignty, and refusing the normality of settler states by establishing comparative relations to Palestine.

Chapter 7, “Crafting Comparability, Composing Palestine” explores how acts of comparison push the boundaries of how the issue of Palestine is composed and acted upon, by rendering particular elements of the Palestinian situation visible and politicizing them. It shows that comparisons to South Africa intervene in the issue by connecting the fragmented situations of Palestinians into the shared reality of apartheid. Comparisons with Turtle Island deepen the

focus on settler colonization, positioning ethnic cleansing and genocide as constitutive elements of the issue of Palestine. This chapter brings together insights into how the issue of Palestine is composed in and through comparison but also shines a light on experiences that are not translated. It discusses how Ireland has become removed from the comparative stage in Palestine, and how some of the particularities of the Palestinian context, such as the situation in Gaza, exceed current acts of comparison. Finally, I argue that these mutual incongruities and contestations are important, as these moments of untranslatability become catalysts for renewed comparative positionings.

Chapter 8, “Conclusion: International Relations Through Elsewhere” circles back to the argumentative threads of the thesis and weaves the comparative stories of Ireland, South Africa, Turtle Island and Palestine together. It presents the main argument that actors in international relations draw upon comparisons in their worldly engagements in at least three distinctive ways: in translating political experiences, in drawing political relations, and in composing political issues. It then discusses the contribution this thesis offers to everyday IR, relational theory, and methodological literatures on the politics of knowledge cultivation. While this concluding chapter thus provides a sense of closure, it is also geared towards openings. It pays specific attention to moments where the argumentative threads do not fit or where they could potentially lead us down a different analytical path. Finally, I discuss the significance of this study for wider debates about international solidarity, global justice, and pressing political issues today.

## Chapter 2 – Acting Through Elsewhere: Reimagining Comparison

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### Introduction

We are often told not to compare ourselves to others: Comparison is the “thief of joy,” it makes you miserable!”<sup>1</sup> Comparing is an “act of violence against the self!”<sup>2</sup> Yet, despite such truisms, it is impossible for any of us not to compare. Comparison, in an everyday sense, allows us to differentiate between different things, beings, ideas, and courses of action. While comparative differentiations can be used in harmful ways - for example when they make us feel less good about ourselves, but also when they result in exclusionary mechanisms, such as Othering - they are also central to the formation of social and political relations.<sup>3</sup> As Steven D. Brown explains, through comparison, we sort and organize ourselves in relation to others, not as independent entities, but as beings who “embody a whole history of intersecting modes of comparison.”<sup>4</sup>

This is also - or perhaps especially - the case for the everyday comparisons made by people across the realm we call “the international.” After all, “comparisons are part and parcel of human encounters. When people meet other people, objects, or ideas that travel, they tend to make comparisons through which translations, borrowings, and differentiations come into being.”<sup>5</sup> In the international realm, we encounter a wide variety of cultures, languages, opinions, and ways of life. These international differences can be seen as empirical, material realities, but they are also products of comparison. Comparison is a key mechanism for making these differences knowable. Acts of comparison (almost always) draw on observed realities, but at the same time transform these realities into knowable entities, often by sharpening distinctions or attributing a particular meaning to them. In this way, comparisons underpin “various forms of social differentiation that constitute and structure world politics.”<sup>6</sup>

In this chapter, I theorize how everyday comparisons become built into the stuff of international relations. As discussed in the previous chapter, given the limited attention paid to why actors in international relations compare and how their comparisons emerge through and shape the international political world, there is a need for “a more general research agenda on the variety and effects of practices of comparison.”<sup>7</sup> This chapter lays the basis for my contribution to this emergent research agenda. In the following sections, I make space for the study of a wide variety of everyday comparative acts by reimagining what we mean by comparison. I then propose three ways in which these comparisons intervene in international relations: by translating political experiences, (re)drawing political relations, and (re)composing political issues.

In so doing, I traverse disciplinary boundaries and synthesize relevant debates across the social sciences, drawing primarily from International Relations, Anthropology, Psychology, and Science and Technology Studies (including Actor-Network Theory). This theoretical engagement

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<sup>1</sup> Quote attributed to Theodore Roosevelt.

<sup>2</sup> Iyanla Vanzant, *Forgiveness: 21 Days to Forgive Everyone for Everything* (Carlsbad: Hay House, 2017), 214.

<sup>3</sup> Sybille Reinke de Buitrago, *Portraying the Other in International Relations: cases of othering, their dynamics and the potential for transformation* (Newcastle Upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2012); Iver B. Neumann, “Self and other in international relations,” *European Journal of International Relations* 2, no. 2 (1996): 139-174.

<sup>4</sup> Steven D. Brown, “Rats, elephants, and bees as matters of concern,” *Common Knowledge* 17, no. 1 (2011): 75.

<sup>5</sup> Swanson, “Landscapes, by comparison,” 105.

<sup>6</sup> Müller, Albert, and Langer, “Practices of comparison and the making of international orders,” 5.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.



is the product of an iterative process. My reading of these debates informs my argument, yet, through analysis, I also noticed that certain theoretical terms were less well attuned to understanding the dynamics of comparison in international relations - at least in these particular cases. Of course, any concept is only partial, capturing some relevant aspect(s) of wider empirical realities. By critically reflecting on what it is these terms captured and conveyed, I was motivated to shift some of the theoretical engagement. I reflect on the process of theorizing and conceptualizing throughout this chapter.

In the first section, I reimagine comparison as “thinking and acting through elsewhere,” and thereby provide a more expansive view of acts of comparison than conventional accounts in International Relations. Section two argues that comparisons intervene in international relations by translating experiences. It theorizes what I mean by “translation,” and introduces the concept of “resonance” to grasp more subliminal modes of comparison. The third section discusses how comparisons intervene in international relations by (re)drawing relations. It provides a relational take on comparison, reflecting on connections between things that are compared, the emergence of comparative scales of similarity and difference, and the function of comparison within political relations. In the fourth and final section, I propose that acts of comparison contribute to the composition of issues in international relations. I discuss how political issues become composed through heterogeneous elements and theorize the role of comparison as a creative - and indeed catastrophic - act.

## 1. Reimagining Comparison

In International Relations, as in neighboring fields, the act of comparison has often come to be interpreted not in an everyday, but in a technical sense. This is because comparison has come to be identified with, and sometimes limited to, a particular research method: the comparative method.<sup>8</sup> The comparative method, in its dominant interpretation by John Stuart Mill, is a technique used to identify causal dynamics by gauging the importance of one factor or another in space or time.<sup>9</sup> This ostensibly timeless mode of comparison attempts to identify factors across cases to assess their relative causal importance in explaining phenomena.<sup>10</sup> Comparison is then based on an inductive logic that seeks to establish generalized observable patterns of cause and effect.<sup>11</sup> There are many different, well-developed interpretations of the comparative method, which vary between quantitative and qualitative work, and are shaped by different ontological and epistemological positions.<sup>12</sup> Among these different approaches, precise definitions and practices

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<sup>8</sup> This is the case in methodological literatures where “comparison” is used as a stand-in for a particular kind of comparative technique, but in more critical or reflexive accounts, this understanding of comparison is often retained, e.g., Naeem Inayatullah and David L. Blaney, *International relations and the problem of difference* (London: Routledge, 2004); Thomas Lindemann, “Constructing subjects and comparison in international relations studies,” in *Resources and Applied Methods in International Relations*, ed. Devin Guillaume (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), 19-30; Werner and Zimmermann, “Beyond Comparison,” 30-50.

<sup>9</sup> John Stuart Mill, *A System of Logic, Ratiocinative and Inductive* (New York: Harper, 1874).

<sup>10</sup> The most prevalent forms of the comparative method are derived from John Stuart Mill’s ‘method of agreement’ and ‘method of difference’, which aim to systematically explain and predict similarities or differences between cases. The method of agreement compares cases where a phenomenon occurred to identify what they have in common and establish the cause, whereas the method of difference compares cases where a phenomenon occurred to similar cases where the phenomenon did not occur to establish the cause.

<sup>11</sup> This understanding of cause, deeply influenced by David Hume, has been critically examined by Milja Kurki, *Causation in international relations: reclaiming causal analysis* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008); Milja Kurki, “Causes of a divided discipline: rethinking the concept of cause in International Relations theory,” *Review of International Studies* 32, no. 2 (2006): 189-216; Milja Kurki and Hidemi Suganami, “Towards the politics of causal explanation: a reply to the critics of causal inquiries,” *International Theory* 4, no. 3 (2012): 400-429.

<sup>12</sup> E.g., Bennett and Elman, “Case study methods in the international relations subfield”; Falleti and Mahoney, “The comparative sequential method”; Pouliot, “Practice tracing.”

of comparison vary. Yet, despite this diversity, most work in this vein tends to assume that a comparison is an act of identifying regularities by contrasting bounded entities.

Through the identification of comparison with the Millian comparative method, imaginations of what the act of comparison is and could be in International Relations and beyond are deeply informed by its methodological assumptions. This means that comparison is often associated with contrasting things imagined to be *discrete*, meaning separate from one another, *autonomous*, implying that they are independent entities, and *symmetrical*, in that they are of equal kind, as these are the comparative conditions required to observe cause and effect.<sup>13</sup> Based on this conception, comparison has sometimes been regarded as a “static”<sup>14</sup> or “rigid”<sup>15</sup> act that limits our understanding of the wider relations from which cases of contexts emerge and in which they are embedded. In this thesis, I provincialize this methodological understanding as part of the wider frame of possible comparative acts. While the Millian approach shapes the study and practice of international relations, it does not have to monopolize our understanding of what comparison is, nor does it exhaust the possibilities of what comparison can do.

To study how everyday comparisons emerge through and shape world politics, I thus propose an expansive conception of the act of comparison that encompasses more differentiated comparative acts. This expansive sense of comparison, “thinking and acting through elsewhere”, encompasses any practice of contrasting theories, texts, relations, objects, experiences, contexts, and (imagined) realities. Drawing on Jennifer Robinson, this conception of comparison does not place strict limits on what kind of things ought to be compared nor on how the comparison ought to proceed.<sup>16</sup> In most cases, thinking and acting through elsewhere will entail an engagement with similarities and differences. Yet, while methodological procedures of comparison are often crafted as assessments of similarity or difference that rest on the literal feature-by-feature observation of already-existing entities according to certain criteria, the entities and scales of comparison may be much more fluid. In this expansive conception of comparison, political experiences can be made comparable across a much wider range of contexts and through a much wider set of practices.

Comparison, of which comparative methods are a part, then constitutes a practice that can be used by a wide diversity of actors in international relations. This allows us to engage with others as active makers of comparison rather than simply as objects to be compared.<sup>17</sup> As Rogers Brubaker states: “there is a big difference between imposing categories of comparison - because we, as researchers, think we know what comparisons, formulated in terms of what categories, are relevant - and seeking to discover the relevant vernacular categories of comparison in different contexts.”<sup>18</sup> Rather than taking particular methodological procedures of comparison as the standard and naturalizing their purposes and embedded forms of judgment, starting from a more expansive conception of comparison allows us to gain understanding of how different people

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<sup>13</sup> While I have renamed these conditions, this point is informed by Patrick Thaddeus Jackson and Daniel Nexon, “Globalization, the Comparative Method, and Comparing Constructions,” in *Constructivism and comparative politics*, ed. Richard T. Green (London: Routledge, 2016), 88-120.

<sup>14</sup> Audie Klotz, Cecelia Lynch, Jeffrey T. Checkel, and Kevin C. Dunn, “Moving beyond the agent-structure debate,” *International studies review* 8, no. 2 (2006): 359.

<sup>15</sup> Debbie Lisle, “A Speculative Lexicon of Entanglement,” *Millennium* 49, no. 3 (2021): 448.

<sup>16</sup> Jennifer Robinson, “Thinking cities through elsewhere: Comparative tactics for a more global urban studies,” *Progress in Human Geography* 40, no. 1 (2016): 3-29.

<sup>17</sup> Bruto Latour as in Felski, “Comparison and translation,” 756.

<sup>18</sup> Rogers Brubaker, “Beyond Comparativism?” *UCLA Theory and Research in Comparative Social Analysis*, 10 September 2003, <http://www.escholarship.org/uc/item/7t52j73w>.

compare and what they “compare for.”<sup>19</sup> The focus of such a *study of comparisons* is phenomenological, with the aim of understanding comparison as a lived social and political experience.<sup>20</sup> Seeing comparisons as lived experiences allows us to study them as part of the everyday “situated, mundane, and habitual” practices that make up international relations.<sup>21</sup>

Given that this reimagination of comparison does not place strict limits on the procedures of comparison, there are no set guidelines for what counts as a reasonable comparison. Questions over the appropriateness and persuasiveness of particular comparisons are not settled by specific rules but by social practices, as comparisons become subject to critical discussion.<sup>22</sup> Indeed, all comparisons can be subject to critical discussion as they inevitably gloss over some specificities and idiosyncrasies. In a sense, we are always comparing apples and oranges, but the question is what comparative scheme makes us distinguish them as apples and oranges in the first place - and with what purpose. Yet, we may want to contest or reject some comparisons because we think, for example, that they fail to appreciate or do violence to the uniqueness of a particular phenomenon. This argument is often made to resist attempts to compare the Holocaust.<sup>23</sup> Critical discussion about the comparative choices made are important as they allow us to examine the stakes and politics that attend different lines of comparison.

This means that our sights are set on comparing as an active, and indeed political verb.<sup>24</sup> In Gayatri Spivak’s words, comparison is never simply “a question of compare and contrast, but rather a matter of judging and choosing.”<sup>25</sup> In so doing, it is not only a technique of gathering knowledge, but also an “act” that constitutes a worldly engagement.<sup>26</sup> As Noah Sobe writes, comparison “haunts, constitutes, and also grounds action ... Comparisons work as technologies to produce truth claims about the normal, the good, and the just – which I say not because I think we can escape this but because I think we need to remember what business we are in.”<sup>27</sup> Rather than taking comparison as a neutral and pre-given technique, this thesis foregrounds questions about how acts of comparison intervene in the world. Reimagining comparison as a worldly engagement allows us to examine the possibilities of comparative acts as well as their effects. In this way, comparison becomes much more than a way of studying causal dynamics, as it is a social and political act with causal implications in and of itself.<sup>28</sup> In this thesis, I theorize and study how comparisons – as modes of thinking and acting through elsewhere - intervene in international relations by translating political experiences, drawing political relations, and composing political issues.

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<sup>19</sup> Joe Deville, Michael Guggenheim, and Zuzana Hrdličková, *Practising Comparison: Logics, Relations, Collaborations* (London: Mattering Press, 2016), 195.

<sup>20</sup> Sheldon Pollock, "Conundrums of Comparison," *KNOW: A Journal on the Formation of Knowledge* 1, no. 2 (2017): 278.

<sup>21</sup> Acuto, "Everyday international relations," 346.

<sup>22</sup> Markus Kornprobst, "Comparing apples and oranges? Leading and misleading uses of historical analogies," *Millennium* 36, no. 1 (2007): 29-49.

<sup>23</sup> Martin Shaw, "From comparative to international genocide studies: The international production of genocide in 20th-century Europe," *European Journal of International Relations* 18, no. 4 (2012): 648.

<sup>24</sup> Ann Laura Stoler, "Considerations on imperial comparisons," in *Empire speaks out: languages of rationalization and self-description in the Russian empire*, ed. Ilya Gerasimov, Jan Kusber, and Alexander Semyonov (Leiden: Brill, 2009), 33-55.

<sup>25</sup> Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "Rethinking comparativism," *New Literary History* 40, no. 3 (2009): 609.

<sup>26</sup> I draw here on Aradau and Huysmans, "Critical methods in International Relations." While Aradau and Huysmans describe methods as 'acts' if they construct worlds and as 'devices' if they disrupt them, I consider both part of "thinking and acting through elsewhere."

<sup>27</sup> Noah W. Sobe, "Problematizing comparison in a post-exploration age: Big data, educational knowledge, and the art of criss-crossing," *Comparative Education Review* 62, no. 3 (2018): 326-335.

<sup>28</sup> I use the term 'cause' in the everyday meaning of a thing that contributes to a certain state of affairs, according to Kurki, "Causes of a divided discipline," 189-216.

## 2. Translating Experiences

Comparisons can translate political experiences taking part in different times and places across the international. I take this as the starting point to understanding what it means to conduct comparisons in the everyday arenas of political life and in what way comparisons might mediate and transform international relations. I focus on the comparison of political *experiences* because experiences, as events or occurrences that leave an impression on someone, are very much situated in a particular space and time yet are also more broadly comparable. This situatedness is very important: When we try to recall an experience far in the past, it is often our sensory memory of the situational circumstances that comes back. Sometimes we remember a specific smell or a view, even without precisely recalling the experience itself. Regardless of this situated specificity, however, experiences are rarely entirely isolated. Despite its uniqueness, an experience will likely have synergies with experiences of others, for example because they are the result of similar structural conditions. Therefore, experiences are very much tied to the larger politics of the societies we live in and comparing them can provide a glimpse of the wider international relations out of which they emerge.

Experiences are one of the most common units of comparison in everyday life. In everyday conversations, we interpret what we go through by finding similarities or differences with the experiences of others so often that most people are rarely aware that they are comparing at all (unlike contrasting our skills or possessions to those of others, for example, which tends to be recognized more directly as comparison). By focusing on the comparison of *political* experiences, I am concerned with experiences that are tied to political views, parties, systems, and events, as well as, in the broader sense, to the exercise of power, for instance through situations of repression or domination. I am interested in how such experiences can be held together internationally, especially if they, at first glance, appear far removed in space and/or time. I focus on how political experiences, which are situated in very different circumstances, can be *translated* internationally through comparison.

Translation is a concept that is increasingly used to denote something beyond the textual rewording of meaning. In Willem Schinkel's words: "Doing' similarity and difference involves a back-and-forth between objects of comparison that involves a constant form of what in Actor-Network Theory [ANT] has been called translation."<sup>29</sup> For ANT, this term refers to the possibility of establishing equivalence between things, through which, for example, an actor can come to speak on behalf of another actor.<sup>30</sup> When we compare our experience to that of someone else, we often translate, and thus speak on behalf of, that other person.<sup>31</sup> The term has been reworked from ANT into International Relations in a broader sense to refer to the process of establishing "equivalence between ideas, objects, and materials that are otherwise different."<sup>32</sup> Given that I attend to the everyday and affective dimension of comparative acts, I focus specifically on translation as the establishment of equivalence between experiences and feelings.

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<sup>29</sup> Schinkel, "Making climates comparable," 377.

<sup>30</sup> Michel Callon and Bruno Latour, "Unscrewing the big Leviathan: how actors macro-structure reality and how sociologists help them to do so," in *Advances in social theory and methodology: Toward an integration of micro-and macro-sociologies*, ed. Karin Knorr Cetina and Aaron Victor Cicourel (London: Taylor & Francis, 1981), 279.

<sup>31</sup> Isabelle Stengers discusses the politics of speaking on behalf of others by imposing comparisons and argues that the objects of comparison need to be able to understand the comparison and have the possibility to negotiate and contest it, in Stengers, "Comparison as a matter of concern," 48-63.

<sup>32</sup> Best and Walters, "'Actor-Network Theory' and international relationality," 333.

It is important to remember that translation, as Andrew Barry writes, is “a form of exercise of power.”<sup>33</sup> Translation always involves “modification” of the things that are being translated, and sometimes also of the person who is doing the translating.<sup>34</sup> Slight modifications arise any time we translate experiences through comparison. When a friend tells us about a painful break-up they are going through, for example, we may - consciously or subconsciously - draw a comparison with that time we went through a tough break-up ourselves. While the comparison can help us gain empathy for our friend and perhaps make us understand them better, there is also friction there, as our experience will have been different from that of our friend’s in at least some respects. The differences may lead us to reconsider our own break-up experience or motivate our friend to look at their situation in a different light. Yet, in some cases, the friction in translating both experiences may actually lead us astray, as our interpretation of our friend’s story may be clouded by our own memories and assumptions. Therefore, as Jacqueline Best and William Walters remark, “in any moment of translation, there is always an element of transformation and perhaps betrayal.”<sup>35</sup>

Critics of academic comparativism have argued that because of these transformations and betrayals, comparison can fail to comprehend – and therefore do violence to – the uniqueness of a phenomenon, and the specific circumstances of subjects.<sup>36</sup> In this critique, the uniqueness of these circumstances complicates or even throws into doubt the possibility of comparing them in a meaningful way.<sup>37</sup> In that sense, comparison may make us understand a particular phenomenon less rather than more, because the abstraction and simplification inherent in comparative acts leads us to disregard crucial dynamics or misconstrues their function or meaning. The act of comparison then “diminishes the opportunity to learn from [a] case.”<sup>38</sup> Through a focus on translation, however, we can see that “it is not translatability that is impossible, but only ‘perfect translatability’”<sup>39</sup> Just as a perfect translation from one particular language to another is never possible, so is a perfect comparison between one experience and another unattainable. Yet, “instead of railing against translation,” Rita Felski suggests, “we are required to consider the trade-offs of particular translations.”<sup>40</sup> In a similar way, the particular translations established through acts of comparison can be considered and debated.

Comparisons translate all kinds of experiences, also ones that occur below conscious awareness. While the term “translation” captures the transformative work that comparisons do, my empirical research underlines that there are moments in which this work is less deliberate. To also get at those subliminal dimensions of translation, I therefore deploy the term “resonance.” This term “originates in the physics of mechanic or acoustic vibration and oscillation and has recently been adopted, often in a somewhat metaphorical sense, in cultural studies and the social sciences.”<sup>41</sup> The term has emerged in International Relations through the work of sociologist

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<sup>33</sup> Andrew Barry, “The translation zone: Between actor-network theory and international relations,” *Millennium* 41, no. 3 (2013): 414.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>35</sup> Best and Walters, “‘Actor-Network Theory’ and international relationality,” 333.

<sup>36</sup> This is sometimes allied to a concern about Eurocentrism and the reduction of peoples and places to Western-centric logics, concepts, or understandings.

<sup>37</sup> Deville, Guggenheim, and Hrdličková, *Practising Comparison*, 21.

<sup>38</sup> Robert Stake as in Lesley Bartlett and Frances Vavrus, “Comparison in Qualitative Research,” in *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Education*, ed. Lesley Bartlett and Frances Vavrus (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020),

<sup>39</sup> Rita Felski, “Comparison and translation,” 762.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 763.

<sup>41</sup> Anne Fleig and Christian von Scheve, eds., *Public spheres of resonance: Constellations of affect and language* (London: Routledge, 2019), 6.

Hartmut Rosa, who posits that “meaningful social relations are driven not through reason (that is, strategic or reflexive introspection) but, instead, a search for resonant relationships that allow for mutually beneficial (symbiotic) forms of being in the world. These resonant relations are not focused on deriving instrumental gain, or a simple desire for survival but, instead, on aesthetics, emotion, and affect.”<sup>42</sup> I use the term resonance to refer to the dynamics of “affecting and being affected.”<sup>43</sup> When something resonates with us, it engages the senses.

Positioning and theorizing comparison as a mode of resonance runs counter to the active and intentional understanding of comparative practices.<sup>44</sup> As discussed before, comparison tends to be positioned as an intentional analytical act with a specific purpose and expected outcome. Through a focus on resonance, however, I argue that comparison is also something that can happen *to us*. When we are affected by something, it may stir up emotions that arise not only from that particular situation, but also from things or moments that we experienced as comparable to it. We may or may not be aware of this comparative resonance. This is especially relevant when we consider catastrophic comparisons, which can translate experiences of trauma. In this study, we will see that exposure to events taking place in Palestine conjures up people’s own painful experiences. As traumatic situations are often triggered subconsciously, the focus on resonance allows me to perceive the multiplicity of everyday, subliminal, and involuntary ways in which acts of comparison translate experiences taking place across the international.

### 3. Drawing Relations

In translating experiences - as well as ideas, objects, contexts, and feelings - acts of comparison also have the capacity to (re)draw relations. I take “relation” to refer to not only a connection between two (or more) things, but also the *relational* condition of existence. Following relational debates in International Relations, I understand existence, of which political life is a part, as a meshwork of complex, fluid relations.<sup>45</sup> By definition, there is no “beginning” or “end” to these relations, which means that a particular relationship never exists entirely on its own. When I argue that comparisons (re)draw relations, I focus on the concrete, practical work of making and transforming connections through acts of comparison - but situate these connections as always embedded in the wider meshwork of international relations. Acts of comparison intervene in this meshwork by holding things together, and in so doing they can draw new relations and strengthen, transform, or erode existing ones.

As discussed above, the dominant conception of comparison in International Relations, as derived from the comparative method posits that things to be compared are discrete, autonomous and symmetrical entities. By contrast, relational debates in International Relations question the extent to which political life can meaningfully be separated into bounded units.<sup>46</sup> Challenging “substantialist” accounts that capture political life in terms of things and their essences, including cases for comparison, relational accounts focus on how political life is

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<sup>42</sup> Austin, “Security compositions,” 259. Rosa’s most important work is Hartmut Rosa, *Resonance: A sociology of our relationship to the world* (Oxford: Polity Press, 2019).

<sup>43</sup> Fleig and von Scheve, *Public spheres of resonance*, 7.

<sup>44</sup> As Michael Callon and John Law have argued: “From managerialism through the “third way” to feminism, these all tell us that passivity is bad, that one should seek out active subject and agent positions.” Michel Callon and John Law, “On qualculation, agency, and otherness,” *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 23, no. 5 (2005): 717-733.

<sup>45</sup> Kurki, *International Relations in a Relational Universe*; Timothy Morton, *The ecological thought* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2010).

<sup>46</sup> Trowsell, Querejazu Escobari, Shani, Behera, Reddekop, and Tickner, “Recrafting international relations through relationality.”

composed through ongoing relations. A relational perspective emphasizes that we can never understand the world from the outside, because we are always situated within relational configurations: “we do not know a priori the boundaries between concepts and things, where measuring instruments end and matter starts.”<sup>47</sup>

From a relational perspective, things to be compared are not simply “found” in the world but only come to exist by abstracting them out of broader entangled realities and histories.<sup>48</sup> Any act of knowing through abstracting, conceptualizing, and drawing boundaries in the world is a “cut” within the broader relations of matter and meaning.<sup>49</sup> It draws momentary boundaries for a particular purpose with material affects. For example, by defining the phenomenon of gender, bodies can come to be regarded and regulated according to comparative categories such as feminine and masculine. We are always responsible for the cuts we make in the world, whether or not we happen to be conscious of them.<sup>50</sup> Any act of comparison, whether made deliberately or subliminally, thus constitutes such a cut within the wider meshwork of relations. In line with this premise, I conceive of things that are compared as not prior to, but emerging through, the relatively unpredictability of relations.

A relational perspective emphasizes that a comparative act “does not involve scales that exist prior to comparison.”<sup>51</sup> What this means is that the notions of similarity and difference are not yet meaningful in and of themselves, that is, if there is not some sort of significance attached to them. Things first need to be *made comparable* by focusing on elements that are regarded as similar enough to even conduct the comparison in the first place. Willem Schinkel describes the crafting of comparability as “comparity work.”<sup>52</sup> This comparability is thus not a given reality but comes closer to what Isabelle Stengers calls an “achievement.”<sup>53</sup> Scales of similarity and difference can only gain meaning on the basis of achieving this initial comparability. When things are established as *similar enough* to compare, for example the experience of one political prisoner in Ireland and another one in Palestine, we may then develop meaningful scales of similarity or difference between them (duration of incarceration, degree of violation of prisoner’s rights, etcetera). Emphasizing and theorizing the practical, relational work of comparison thus draws attention to “the fact that salient features of similarity and difference *arise through comparison rather than precede it.*”<sup>54</sup>

By highlighting such salient features, comparative acts are embedded in, and shape, everyday social and political relations. Psychological literatures have long centered on how people compare their own attitudes, abilities, or possessions to those of others.<sup>55</sup> They speak of “social comparisons,” through which people evaluate their own traits to others. Social comparisons tend to be divided into upward comparisons to people perceived to be more fortunate than the self,

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<sup>47</sup> Elisabeth Prügl, “The Gender Thing: Apparatuses and Intra-Agential Ethos,” *Millennium* 49, no. 1 (2020): 147.

<sup>48</sup> Thea Riofrancos, “From Cases to Sites,” in *Rethinking Comparison: Innovative Methods for Qualitative Political Inquiry*, ed. Erica S. Simmons and Nicholas Rush Smith (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021), 109. See also: Alice Engelhard, Andy Li, and Enrike van Wingerden, “Entanglements and Detachments in Global Politics,” *Millennium* 49, no. 3 (2021): 431-434.

<sup>49</sup> Karen Barad, *Meeting the universe halfway: Quantum physics and the entanglement of matter and meaning* (Durham: Duke university Press, 2007).

<sup>50</sup> Kurki, *International Relations in a Relational Universe*, 148.

<sup>51</sup> Schinkel, “Making climates comparable,” 377.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

<sup>53</sup> Stengers, “Comparison as a matter of concern,” 48-63.

<sup>54</sup> Leigh K. Jenco, Murad Idris, and Megan C. Thomas, “Comparison, connectivity, and disconnection,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Comparative Political Theory*, ed. Leigh K. Jenco, Murad Idris, and Megan C. Thomas (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), 8.

<sup>55</sup> Leon Festinger, “A theory of social comparison processes,” *Human relations* 7, no. 2 (1954): 117-140; Jerry Suls and Ladd Wheeler, eds, *Handbook of social comparison: Theory and research* (Berlin: Springer Science & Business Media, 2013); Ladd Wheeler and Kunitate Miyake, “Social comparison in everyday life,” *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 62, no. 5 (1992): 760-773.

and downward comparison to people perceived to be less fortunate.<sup>56</sup> While these are the kinds of comparisons we are often told not engage in as they would make us unhappy, studies show that they are central to processes of self-evaluation and self-enhancement.<sup>57</sup> This “social” view of comparison is relational – in that the vision of the self emerges through the relation with others – but tends to be limited to modes of relating that are inherently competitive, to the detriment of other ways in which acts of comparison shape social relations. As a response, there has also been an effort to study the psychology of comparison in a less competitive and more intimate sense.<sup>58</sup> Rather than centering on a comparison target as perceived as “above” or “below” the self, the focus is on whether the comparison target is perceived as sharing something in common or not. As opposed to the “vertical” dimension of status and dominance, these comparisons take place along the “horizontal” dimension of solidarity and communion.<sup>59</sup>

Similarly, I examine how comparisons (re)draw relations, focusing specifically on how relations of similarity and closeness are formed and maintained internationally through acts of comparison. I hesitate, however, to conceptualize these comparisons as “horizontal.” While I examine how acts of comparison establish intimate connections, I am attentive to the power differentials that operate in and through these comparisons. Such differentials exist even, as postcolonial and critical race theorists have shown, within relations of deep solidarity.<sup>60</sup> This is also the case for the formation of relations through comparison, as the ways in which political choices about what and who we compare for, and thus which values, standards, and criteria matter, become wrapped up in comparative acts.<sup>61</sup> Studies have shown that “in a world structured in dominance, comparisons are initiated in the name of those values, standards, and criteria that are dominant.”<sup>62</sup> Benedict Anderson called these inscribed forms of judgement the “specter of comparison,” as these are the comparative optics that haunt present-day comparative practices.<sup>63</sup> In this thesis, I am similarly mindful of how comparisons reflect and shape power relations. To allow for the agency of different makers of comparison within the catastrophic contexts I investigate, I do not presuppose any straightforward directionality to comparison.

I thus interrogate how comparisons are used politically, as individual acts, but also as collective ones that bind groups together - most notably, in this study, through the establishment of a common sense of comparability with Palestine. In moving in-between individual and collective acts of comparison, I do not mean to suggest that comparison necessarily leads to connectivity or group-formation. Indeed, as we will see throughout this study, comparisons between political experiences and contexts are often contested, undermined, or silenced. This means that the relations drawn through comparison can be tenuous, and that ultimately, they can also fail. In Matei Candea’s words, “scholars need to make some space within the concept of ‘relationship,’ to acknowledge the broad spectrum that lies between complete lack of connection,

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<sup>56</sup> Wendy Berry Mendes, Jim Blascovich, Brenda Major, and Mark Seery, “Challenge and threat responses during downward and upward social comparisons,” *European Journal of Social Psychology* 31, no. 5 (2001): 477-497.

<sup>57</sup> Mussweiler, Rüter, and Epstude, “The man who wasn’t there,” 689-696; Dorothy A. Thornton and A. John Arrowood, “Self-evaluation, self-enhancement, and the locus of social comparison,” *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology* 1 (1966): 40-48.

<sup>58</sup> Kenneth D. Locke, “Status and solidarity in social comparison: agentic and communal values and vertical and horizontal directions,” *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 84, no. 3 (2003): 619-631.

<sup>59</sup> Kenneth D. Locke, “Connecting the horizontal dimension of social comparison with self-worth and self-confidence,” *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin* 31, no. 6 (2005): 795.

<sup>60</sup> E.g., Gada Mahrouse, *Conflicted commitments: Race, privilege, and power in solidarity activism* (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s Press, 2014).

<sup>61</sup> Casper Bruun Jensen, “Comparative relativism: Symposium on an impossibility,” *Common Knowledge* 17, no. 1 (2011): 1-12.

<sup>62</sup> Rajagopalan Radhakrishnan, *Theory in an uneven world* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2003), 74.

<sup>63</sup> Benedict Anderson, *The spectre of comparisons: Nationalism, Southeast Asia, and the world* (London: Verso, 1998).



on the one hand, and actual ‘intersubjectivity,’ on the other hand.”<sup>64</sup> In this study, I focus on how relations can be drawn and strengthened through comparison, and even grow into sustained political movements, as well as how they can become weakened or break down.

In studying catastrophic comparisons, I thus try to make sense of the drawing, deepening, and eroding of relations through comparison. As discussed in the previous chapter, catastrophe denotes not only “disaster,” but also the relational and unpredictable encounter between different lifeworlds and viewpoints. In line with this interpretation, I pay close attention to how acts of comparison become contested in catastrophic ways. This contestation of lifeworlds and viewpoints does not necessarily mean that a certain comparison will be rejected in its entirety. In some cases, interlocutors will dispute some terms of the comparison with Palestine but not others, or they will slightly shift the comparison in another direction. In this sense, I focus on many different degrees and forms of relationality with Palestine, as they are shaped through acts of comparison.

#### 4. Composing Issues

I suggest that comparisons contribute to the composition of political issues in international relations, with “political issues” defined as controversies debated within and governed through political systems. The work of making things comparable is at the root of rendering political issues visible and politicizing them.<sup>65</sup> Initially, my theoretical interest was in how comparisons enact political issues. The term “enactment” in ANT, coined by Annemarie Mol, is aimed to get at the active shaping (“enacting”) of reality through practice.<sup>66</sup> I expected comparisons emerging from Ireland, South Africa, and Turtle Island to enact “Palestine,” as a political issue. Inspired by debates on enacting multiplicity, I envisioned multiple versions of what Palestine “is” in international relations, informed by comparisons with these different contexts.<sup>67</sup> Yet, through participant observation and discussions with my interlocutors, I realized that their comparisons build upon, fold into, and deepen one another. Rather than a multiplicity of enactments of Palestine, there was a fragile, though shifting, effort to establish consensus across space and time. Therefore, what I was observing could better be described as the combined - though never unitary - composition of Palestine as a political issue.

The term “composition,” as defined by Bruno Latour, refers to the act of putting things together while retaining their heterogeneity.<sup>68</sup> The term captures how the world “gains a collectively coherent understanding, through our embedding in an incoherent, complex, messy, and nonlinear set of relations with other humans, nonhumans, or objects.”<sup>69</sup> While substantialist accounts of international relations are limited by their ability to account for change, given that they assume that entities have stable essences, relational approaches, in turn, face a challenge in explaining how configurations are created as stable entities and how they endure over time. Speaking of the composition of international relations forms a way of dealing with the stickiness

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<sup>64</sup> Matei Candea, “‘I Fell in Love with Carlos the Meerkat’: Engagement and Detachment in Human–Animal Relations,” *American Ethnologist* 37, no. 2 (2010): 244.

<sup>65</sup> Schinkel, “Making climates comparable,” 392.

<sup>66</sup> Annemarie Mol, *The Body Multiple: Ontology in Medical Practice* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2002).

<sup>67</sup> E.g., Claudia Aradau and Jef Huysmans, “Assembling credibility: Knowledge, method and critique in times of ‘post-truth,’” *Security Dialogue* 50, no. 1 (2019): 40-58; Claudia Aradau and Martina Tazzioli, “Biopolitics multiple: Migration, extraction, subtraction,” *Millennium* 48, no. 2 (2020): 198-220; Vicki Squire, “Reshaping critical geopolitics? The materialist challenge,” *Review of International Studies* 41, no. 1 (2015): 139-159.

<sup>68</sup> Latour, “An attempt at a “compositionist manifesto,”” 473-474.

<sup>69</sup> Austin, “A parasitic critique for international relations,” 225.

of political realities, even when they are always in-motion as they emerge through shifting relational configurations. For my purposes, the term allows me to focus on how acts of comparison with these different contexts jointly contribute to composing the issue of Palestine, despite the existence of mutual incongruities and contestations.

A focus on composition brings into view all the ideas, materials, and acts through which entities are made (always, as discussed before, as temporary “cuts” rather than permanent boundaries). The international political world, in this view “does not precede the mundane practices in which we interact with it, but is rather shaped within these practices.”<sup>70</sup> Composing gets at the active making of the world, in this case in and through comparisons. The making of the world is a risky and uncertain endeavor, as it “has to be built from utterly heterogeneous parts that will never make a whole, but at best a fragile, revisable, and diverse composite material.”<sup>71</sup> Failure, as discussed in the previous section, is therefore always a part of composing. Any sticky composition can also be understood as an achievement, in that despite its fragility and contentiousness, it “hangs together” as a recognizable and salient entity.<sup>72</sup>

Following these insights, I am concerned with the composition of “Palestine” as an issue in international relations, focusing specifically on its composition through acts of comparison. I follow Stefan Helmreich in thinking about how both the abstract and the empirical, material realities of Palestine are composed. Helmreich, in his ethnography of the phenomena of life, water, and sound, argues that these phenomena are “abstractions as well as empirical phenomena to be investigated, reengineered and rechanneled.”<sup>73</sup> “Abstraction,” in his words, is “a process – an action – and it is always partial, unfinished, undone, and sometimes reversible.”<sup>74</sup> Comparison contributes to the creative process of “abstracting the world” by illuminating certain elements of similarity or difference whilst disregarding others.<sup>75</sup> Through comparison, the relations between the abstract and the empirical or to the material “can be various – opposite at one moment, identical at another, an unfinished hybrid at another.”<sup>76</sup> Creating an abstraction such as “Palestine” is therefore a multidirectional, everyday activity “layered into the traffic of contingent human relations across a buzz of domains.”<sup>77</sup>

While “Palestine” as a political issue refers to the contestation over the empirical and material territory between the Jordan River and the Mediterranean Sea, currently under occupation by Israel, it also refers to a more abstract struggle over national or decolonial aspirations.<sup>78</sup> This more abstract notion of Palestine evokes notions of struggle, adversity, and resistance that go far beyond this particular geography. Given the importance of Palestine in international politics and activism, the abstract meaning of Palestine has travelled to and transformed within a myriad of contexts. Among which, for example, the Palestinian diaspora, for whom Palestine is increasingly an abstract aspiration. As the exiled Palestinian author Mourid Barghouti writes, “the long Occupation has succeeded in changing us from children of Palestine

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<sup>70</sup> Annemarie Mol, “Ontological Politics. A Word and Some Questions,” *The Sociological Review* 47, no. 1 (1999): 77.

<sup>71</sup> Latour, “An attempt at a” compositionist manifesto”, 747.

<sup>72</sup> Mol, *The body multiple*, 54.

<sup>73</sup> Stefan Helmreich, *Sounding the limits of life: essays in the anthropology of biology and beyond* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015), xx.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, xxi.

<sup>75</sup> Enrike van Wingerden, “Toward an Affirmative Critique of Abstraction in International Relations Theory,” *E-International Relations*, 12 December 2017, <https://www.e-ir.info/2017/12/12/toward-an-affirmative-critique-of-abstraction-in-international-relations-theory/>.

<sup>76</sup> Helmreich, *Sounding the limits of life*, xxi.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, 185.

<sup>78</sup> Or rather, from Zionist points of view, a threat to Jewish nationhood.

to children of the idea of Palestine.”<sup>79</sup> Steven Salaita has similarly argued that “Palestine has eroded as a landscape or as a polity, but it has thrived as an idea, and as an ideal.”<sup>80</sup> Yet, the concrete, material reality of Palestine and the more abstract, ideational meanings attached to it are connected in various and complex ways. When we speak of Palestine as an issue in international relations, we usually speak of the shifting but sticky composition of all of these elements: the Palestinian flags, the checkpoints, the exiles, the meeting rooms, the olive trees, the solidarity movements, and the separation walls.

In International Relations, such “amalgamations of purposes, technologies, institutions, rules, and norms” have come to be theorized as “governance objects.”<sup>81</sup> Such objects can be anything from the economy and the climate to entities such as “Europe” or “Palestine.” Indeed, “anything might become a governance object provided it can be designated, rendered governable, and problematized.”<sup>82</sup> A governance object must be composed as “distinct, malleable and politically salient.”<sup>83</sup> Creating the (shifting) boundaries around an object entails a multiplicity of “cuts” within relations, which are not necessarily congruous with one another as they reflect differing conceptions and interests.<sup>84</sup> Therefore, political strife and contestation are foundational to the composition of a governance object, as well as to whether the composition succeeds, and how important the object becomes.<sup>85</sup> In this study, my focus is not so much on theorizing Palestine as a governance object per se, but rather on zooming in on the everyday work of composing Palestine. While I opt to use the language of a “political issue” rather than a “governance object” to describe the composition of Palestine, primarily to remain within everyday language, my approach is inspired by and has close affinity with this literature.

I connect specifically to the notion that political issues (or “governance objects”) have a dynamic relationship to knowledge acts. Their emergence is both “formed by knowledgeable practices” and “makes possible new forms and domains of knowledge.”<sup>86</sup> I am interested in how *comparative* knowledge becomes part of the composition of Palestine, and how this composition can engender new and imaginative political possibilities. Adding to emergent work on how comparative knowledge “informs and is incorporated into ordering practices in different domains of world politics,” as mentioned in the previous chapter, my contribution lies in studying how comparisons contribute to the composition of issues in international relations and interrogating the implications in providing possibilities for political practice and imagination.<sup>87</sup>

As theorized above, I see comparisons as contributing to the composition of both the abstract understanding of an issue and its empirical, material reality. Comparison, as thinking and acting through elsewhere, is therefore “not only an analytical act, but also a landscape-making and body-making force.”<sup>88</sup> Heather Anne Swanson shows how this works materially through her

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<sup>79</sup> Mourid Barghouti, *I Saw Ramallah* (London: Bloomsbury, 2005), 62.

<sup>80</sup> Salaita, *Inter/nationalism*, 167.

<sup>81</sup> Allan, “From subjects to objects,” 849. I provide a more extensive overview of this literature in Enrike van Wingerden, “Putting “Things” First: On Objects and Agency in International Relations,” in *The Oxford Handbook of International Political Sociology*, ed. Stacie Goddard, George Lawson, and Ole Jacob Sending (Oxford: Oxford University Press, forthcoming).

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, 853.

<sup>83</sup> Olaf Corry, *Constructing a Global Polity: Theory, Discourse and Governance* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2013), 87.

<sup>84</sup> Ole Jacob Sending, *The politics of expertise: Competing for authority in global governance* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2015).

<sup>85</sup> Corry, *Constructing a Global Polity*, 90.

<sup>86</sup> Allan, “From subjects to objects,” 854.

<sup>87</sup> Müller, Albert, and Langer, “Practices of comparison and the making of international orders,” 2.

<sup>88</sup> Heather Anne Swanson, “Landscapes, by comparison,” *The World Multiple: The Quotidian Politics of Knowing and Generating Entangled Worlds*, ed. Kei'ichi Omura, Grant Otsuki, Shiho Satsuka, and Atsuro Morita (London: Routledge, 2018), 105.

ethnography of transnational comparisons.<sup>89</sup> Swanson analyzes how Hokkaido, an island colonized by Japan and currently the northernmost part of the country, became rendered modern through comparisons with other places, including the American West and Southern Chile. These comparisons became literally built into the landscape as they were taken as inspiration for “modernizing” and thereby altering Hokkaido’s plant and animal life, and with it the livelihoods of the Indigenous Ainu people. This analysis shows, in Swanson’s words, that “comparisons, seen through Hokkaido’s landscapes, are always inside the material stuff of the world.”<sup>90</sup>

Comparison, in this way, constitutes a “constructive, creative act” of composing the world.<sup>91</sup> In so doing, everyday comparisons can have unforeseen, inventive, or in other words, catastrophic consequences. As we will see in exploring everyday comparisons between Palestine on the one hand, and Ireland, South Africa, and Turtle Island on the other, thinking and acting through these various elsewheres provides unexpected, creative political possibilities. Acts of comparison are able to transform how an issue such as Palestine becomes known, built, and acted upon by bringing to light “unexpected connections and illuminating parallels between phenomena [ostensibly] separated in space and time.”<sup>92</sup> As they become incorporated into the work of composition, comparisons, manifested through everyday utterances, thus become a fundamental part of the grander workings of international relations.

## Conclusion

In this chapter, I have assembled and transformed ideas from across disciplinary boundaries to theorize how acts of comparison intervene in international relations. By expanding the meaning of comparison to “thinking and acting through elsewhere,” I have started to bring into view a wider variety of everyday comparative acts. Rather than taking one mode of comparison as the standard and naturalizing its purpose and embedded forms of judgment, this expansive reimagination is aimed at interrogating how different people compare and what they compare for. I have thereby positioned comparison not only as a particular way of knowing, but also as a political act with significant implications. In this thesis, this conceptualization allows me to examine the stakes and politics that attend different lines of comparison.

This chapter posited that acts of comparison translate political experiences. Comparison is a common, everyday way of translating different experiences by establishing equivalence between them. Yet, I argued that any act of translation inevitably leads to modification. While some state that comparison therefore risks simplifying or misconstruing a particular experience by translating it, I have argued that this is part and parcel of any translation. Rather than aiming for perfect translatability, I have foregrounded the critical discussion of particular translations. I adopted the term “resonance” to capture the less intentional and more subliminal moments of translation. The focus on resonance makes it possible to say that comparison is also something that happens *to us* on a more subconscious level. Together, these terms allow for the study of a wide array of instances of comparative translation.

This chapter also argued that by establishing equivalence, acts of comparison (re)draw relations. It asserted that any act of comparison, whether made deliberately or subliminally,

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<sup>89</sup> Heather Anne Swanson, *Spanning Modern Fish: Transnational Comparison in the Making of Japanese Salmon* (Washington: University of Washington Press, 2022).

<sup>90</sup> Swanson, “Landscapes, by comparison,” 120.

<sup>91</sup> Deville, Guggenheim, and Hrdličková, *Practising Comparison*, 101.

<sup>92</sup> Felski, “Comparison and translation,” 755.

constitutes a “cut” within the wider meshwork of relations. Drawing relations through comparison entails the concrete, practical work of bringing things together and gauging their similarities and differences. I discussed how comparisons shape relations between self and others, and how perceived similarity can grow into closeness and group-formation. Yet, I also underlined how comparisons may be used to entrench power relations. Ultimately, the relations that are (re)drawn through comparison are tenuous and have the potential to fail. Therefore, I argued for the need to focus on different degrees and forms of relationality through comparison, as well as how relations become contested.

Finally, this chapter contended that acts of comparison (re)compose political issues in international relations. I positioned political issues as sticky amalgamations of different actors, material realities, and knowledge acts - amongst which are situated acts of comparison. I argued that it is through the work of putting things together, while retaining their heterogeneity, that political issues gain a collective understanding whilst being embedded in complex and messy relations of various kinds and various intensities. The composition of an issue can be understood as an achievement, in that despite its divergent parts, composition allows it to hang together as a recognizable and salient entity. As a particular way of holding things together, comparison contributes to the abstract and material composition of the issue of Palestine. By being composed into pivotal political issues, therefore, comparisons become part of the actual stuff of international relations.

This theorization lays the basis for the empirical analyses of comparisons with Palestine emerging from Ireland, South Africa, and Turtle Island in this thesis. Yet, it also provides a wider framework for the study of everyday comparisons that contributes to the emergent research agenda on comparative practices in international relations. This theoretical framework makes it possible to explore the chains of matter and meaning that link everyday comparisons – all the way through the translation of political experiences and the formation of political relations – to the composition of political issues in international relations. In other words, it provides the groundwork for the study of the everyday, relational making and doing of international relations, in and through comparison.

# Chapter 3 – From the River over the Sea: Studying Comparisons to Palestine

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## Introduction

“From the river to the sea” is a rallying cry used internationally during demonstrations for Palestine. It describes and evokes Palestine as it was prior to the 1948 *Nakba*, or catastrophe: A landscape of mountains, plains, and deserts that stretches out all the way from the Jordan river to the Mediterranean Sea. During demonstrations, people say it, sing it, and scream it out loud. The cry constitutes both a distant reality and a promise, as revealed in the following part: “From the river to the sea, Palestine will be free.” In this thesis, I study how Palestine becomes stretched out even further, as it becomes compared to other political contexts. This chapter centers Palestine as the heart of this study and foregrounds my way of studying its comparative linkages with other situations of political contestation. Through comparison, Palestine comes to encompass landscapes and lifeworlds far beyond its physical territory, from the river over the sea.

This chapter lays the groundwork for this ethnography of comparisons, by elaborating on the research choices that I made in studying how comparisons intervene in international relations. The first section introduces the history of the Palestinian struggle for liberation as the context of this study. Section two outlines the emergence of international comparisons to Palestine and discusses the selection of Ireland, South Africa, and Turtle Island as research sites. I then turn to the research methods, as the third section elaborates on the fieldwork conducted for this study, while the fourth section centers on the interviews. The fifth section considers the ethical commitments that guided this study, along with the ethical challenges that emerged along the way. The sixth and final section discusses the mode of analysis used to interpret the fieldwork and interview findings, forming the basis of this study of comparisons.

## 1. From the River: The Palestinian Struggle

In this section, I introduce the history of the Palestinian struggle as the starting point of this ethnography of comparisons. The Palestinian struggle started at the end of the nineteenth century, when the first Zionist settlements emerged.<sup>1</sup> Zionism, a nationalist ideology for the establishment of a Jewish state in Palestine, was initially a marginal sect but gained influence in the early twentieth century through a timely alliance with Great Britain.<sup>2</sup> In 1916, Britain assumed control over Palestine through the Sykes-Picot agreement, the secret treaty that divided the provinces of the Ottoman Empire, including Palestine, into areas of French and British imperial control.<sup>3</sup> The year after, in 1917, the British government issued the Balfour Declaration, professing support for “the establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish people.”<sup>4</sup> The British authorities first enabled the Zionist movement to acquire more land, but then, in order to quell revolts and gain Arab support in WWII, renounced the idea of partitioning Palestine and limited Jewish immigration. This cap on migration came under pressure as it interfered with Zionist

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<sup>1</sup> Mazin B. Qumsiyeh, *Popular Resistance in Palestine: A History of Hope and Empowerment* (London: Pluto Press, 2011), 38-39.

<sup>2</sup> The 1896 pamphlet “The Jewish State” by Theodor Herzl became the basis for the Zionist ideology. The pamphlet postulated that the creation of a Jewish State in Palestine (or potentially Argentina) would be the solution to centuries of anti-Semitism in Europe.

<sup>3</sup> Rashid Khalidi, *The Hundred Years' War on Palestine: A History of Settler Colonialism and Resistance, 1917-2017* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2020).

<sup>4</sup> Arthur Balfour, “The Balfour Declaration” [letter to Lord Rothschild], WWI D.A., Official Papers, 2 November 2017.

intentions to relocate Jewish refugees from Europe to Palestine during and after WWII. A looming Jewish armed struggle finally led the British to hand control over Mandatory Palestine to the United Nations (UN) in 1948.<sup>5</sup>

When the UN Special Committee on Palestine proposed its plan for partition in 1947, war broke out. The UK withdrew its armed forces, upon which the Jewish Agency, the key organization promoting and supporting Jewish immigration as part of the Zionist movement, proclaimed the establishment of the State of Israel. Between 1947 and 1949, in what became known as the *Nakba* (catastrophe), around 750,000 Palestinians – out of a population of 1.4 million – were uprooted and expelled from their homes by settlers to make way for the Jewish state. Egypt, Transjordan, Iraq and Syria attacked Israeli forces, leading to the 1948 Arab-Israeli War, which ended with Israeli victory. The 1949 Armistice Agreements set out the Green Line, the demarcation line between Palestinian and Israeli land. The Green Line superseded the boundaries proposed in the UN partition plan and allocated the State of Israel the great majority of land. For nearly two decades, there was a fragile cease-fire, though expropriation of Palestinian land continued through new Israeli land laws.<sup>6</sup> In 1967, in what became known as the Six-Day War or *Naksa* (setback), Israel staged surprise strikes and a ground offensive that seized the remaining Palestinian land: the Gaza Strip, the West Bank, and East Jerusalem, establishing the occupation that continues until this day.

Throughout this time, the Palestinian struggle against the Israeli settler colonial project grew stronger. The Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) was founded in the 1960s, laying the foundations of the Palestinian political struggle. The PLO combined armed and unarmed struggle, including guerilla attacks and plane hijackings, such as the attack during the Munich Olympics in 1972 and the Dawson Field hijackings of four airliners in 1970.<sup>7</sup> The Palestinian struggle became particularly visible internationally through the First *Intifada* (uprising) of 1987-1991. The largely unarmed uprising was an outburst of “suppressed dismay, frustration and anger against economic exploitation, land expropriation, daily harassment, Jewish settlements and the sense of no escape from a long-endured occupation.”<sup>8</sup> Protest actions that were deployed included strikes, refusal to pay taxes and fines and obey military orders, mass resignations from public service jobs, and the display of Palestinian flags (which were banned), but also the throwing of rocks and Molotov-cocktails.<sup>9</sup> They involved all segments of the population, bridging existing cleavages based on age, gender, religion, and rurality.<sup>10</sup> As the uprising became more organized and institutionalized, the PLO assumed leadership and proclaimed the establishment of the State of Palestine.<sup>11</sup>

Between 1993-1995, the PLO represented the Palestinian people in the secret negotiations with Israel that would lead to the Oslo Accords, aimed at brokering “peace” in the wake of the *Intifada*. While the Oslo process was initially met with some enthusiasm in Palestine,

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<sup>5</sup> Marwan Darweish and Andrew Rigby, *Popular Protest in Palestine: The Uncertain Future of Unarmed Resistance* (London: Pluto Press, 2015), 27.

<sup>6</sup> Sabri Jiryis, "The legal structure for the expropriation and absorption of Arab lands in Israel." *Journal of Palestine Studies* 2, no. 4 (1973): 82-104.

<sup>7</sup> Yezid Sayigh, *Armed Struggle and the Search for State: The Palestinian National Movement, 1949-1993* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998).

<sup>8</sup> Ilan Pappé, *A History of Modern Palestine: One Land, Two Peoples* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 232.

<sup>9</sup> Qumsiyeh, *Popular Resistance in Palestine*, 141.

<sup>10</sup> Jamal Raji Nassar and Roger Heacock, eds, *Intifada: Palestine at the Crossroads* (Westport: Greenwood Publishing Group, 1990), 16.

<sup>11</sup> Helena Cobban, "The PLO and the "Intifada", " *Middle East Journal* 44, no. 2 (1990): 207-233.

it was quickly revealed to be “yet another form of occupation.”<sup>12</sup> It established international recognition for the PLO as the legitimate representative of the Palestinian people and created a Palestinian Authority (PA) that was given limited jurisdiction over parts of the West Bank and Gaza. In return, it expected the PA to “contain the frustration of their people and guarantee the safety of the settlers, as Israel continued to build new settlements and appropriate more Palestinian land.”<sup>13</sup> It was now the authority that was meant to work on behalf of the Palestinians that carried out mass arrests and censorship of the press in order to silence resistance.<sup>14</sup>

Throughout the post-Oslo period, the Palestinian situation worsened. The creation of the PA had caused problems for the struggle for liberation, as it was expected to contain popular resistance through a vast security apparatus, backed by Israel and the United States. The Second *Intifada* (2000-2005), which unleashed built-up frustration and resentment over the Oslo process, never reached the same levels of mass mobilization as the First *Intifada*.<sup>15</sup> With local committees weakened through decades of Israeli repression and much of the population alienated from political action through years of PA rule, the only structures remaining to organize civil resistance were now political factions and professionalized NGO’s that were established in the wake of Oslo.<sup>16</sup> The aims of these NGOs had been increasingly adapted to the agendas of foreign donors, rather than the needs of Palestinians.<sup>17</sup> Many Palestinians sensed that their political struggle for liberation, and the social solidarity and community of care that sustained it, was giving way to self-serving behavior motivated by material interests.<sup>18</sup> Instead, militias associated with political parties, such as Fatah and Hamas and the Islamic Jihad, claimed the leadership of the struggle for liberation, using more violent resistance tactics.<sup>19</sup>

During and after the Second *Intifada*, Israeli strategy towards Palestine transitioned into a new phase of disengagement, segregation, and enclosure.<sup>20</sup> Ever-tightening restrictions on movement were erected with hundreds of checkpoints separating Palestinian communities from each other. This culminated in the construction of the so-called Apartheid Wall, which fenced off the West Bank, and further encroached into diminishing Palestinian territory.<sup>21</sup> In 2005, Israel evacuated its settlements in Gaza and some in the West Bank, to secure a Jewish majority in Israel itself.<sup>22</sup> When Hamas took control of Gaza in 2007, Israel installed a permanent land, sea, and air blockade, imposing permanent food, water, medicine, and electricity shortages and preventing the construction of an airport or seaport. For Gazans, the only possibilities of travelling outside Gaza are through rare Israeli permits or smuggling tunnels along the Egyptian border, effectively turning Gaza into an open-air prison. Since then, Israel has also launched four

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<sup>12</sup> Pappé, *A History of Modern Palestine: One Land, Two Peoples*, 272.

<sup>13</sup> Tanya Reinhart, *The Road Map to Nowhere: Israel/Palestine since 2003* (London/New York: Verso, 2006), 147.

<sup>14</sup> Qumsiyeh, *Popular Resistance in Palestine*, 163.

<sup>15</sup> Julie M. Norman, *The Second Palestinian Intifada: Civil Resistance* (London: Routledge, 2010), 1-6.

<sup>16</sup> Rema Hammami and Salim Tamari, "The Second Uprising: End or New Beginning?" *Journal of Palestine Studies* 30, no. 2 (2001): 17.

<sup>17</sup> Benoit Challand, "Looking Beyond the Pale: International Donors and Civil Society Promotion in Palestine," *Palestine-Israel Journal of Politics, Economics, and Culture* 12, no. 1 (2005), 57.

<sup>18</sup> Lori Allen, *The Rise and Fall of Human Rights: Cynicism and Politics in Occupied Palestine* (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 2013), 9-10.

<sup>19</sup> Julie M. Norman, "Introduction: Nonviolent Resistance in the Second Intifada," in *Nonviolent Resistance in the Second Intifada: Activism and Advocacy*, ed. Maia Hallward and Julie M. Norman (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 2.

<sup>20</sup> Oren Yiftachel, "Neither Two States nor One: The Disengagement and “Creeping Apartheid” in Israel/Palestine,” *The Arab World Geographer/Le Géographe Du Monde Arabe* 8, no. 3 (2005): 125-129.

<sup>21</sup> Maia Hallward, *Transnational Activism and the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 27; Darweish and Rigby, *Popular Protest in Palestine*, 53.

<sup>22</sup> Jonathan Rynhold and Dov Waxman, "Ideological change and Israel's disengagement from Gaza," *Political Science Quarterly* 123, no. 1 (2008): 11-37.



military offensives on Gaza in 2008, 2012, 2014, and 2021. Meanwhile, Israeli settlements in the West Bank continue to rapidly expand and Palestinians are increasingly expelled from their East Jerusalem homes. The result is limited Palestinian autonomy over an ever shrinking and more heavily controlled and militarized territory.

## 2. Over the Sea: Ireland, South Africa, Turtle Island

Palestine is often the subject of comparison, as the Palestinian struggle has become one of the most visible political issues of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. In this section, I discuss how Palestine has come to matter internationally through comparison, and I introduce the three sites through which I study these international comparisons. As a relatively late case of settler colonization, the occupation of Palestine became built on comparisons with prior histories of occupation. During the early twentieth century Mandate period, the British were already informed by their earlier experience of colonial administration. Looking back at the British Mandate, Ronald Storrs, the British Military Governor of Jerusalem, described the purpose of the 1917 Balfour Declaration as the formation of “a little loyal Jewish Ulster in a sea of potentially hostile Arabism,” drawing explicit comparisons with the British occupation of the North of Ireland.<sup>23</sup> In the 1930s, when the Palestinian Revolt against the British administration of Mandate Palestine erupted, Grattan Bushe, a legal adviser to the British Colonial Office, warned that repression of the revolt by force would be “repeating the mistake which was made in Ireland.”<sup>24</sup>

A few decades later, the construction of the State of Israel also came to incorporate comparisons to other settler colonial projects. David Ben-Gurion, the first prime minister of Israel, identified strongly with the American settler project in Turtle Island, writing that “We who want to build a new country, amidst desert and desolation, should see how the expelled and persecuted Sons of England established a rich and powerful state, first in the world for its resources and creative powers.”<sup>25</sup> Even as recent as December 2013, when the plan to forcibly remove the entire Palestinian Bedouin population living in the South of Israel was debated in the Israeli parliament, settler colonial comparisons were made. During the debate, Member of the Knesset (MK) Hanna Swaid remarked to the committee chair: “You want to transfer an entire population,” to which the chair, MK Miri Regev, replied: “Yes, as the Americans did to the Indians.”<sup>26</sup>

Historical research could reveal how these comparisons informed British and Israeli political decision-making in Palestine. Following Ann Laura Stoler, such research could trace how comparisons become embedded in historically shifting strategies of rule.<sup>27</sup> Yet, in this study, I focus not on how comparisons become mobilized by colonial powers, but rather, on what Stoler would deem “counter-comparisons”: comparisons that challenge or provincialize the comparative choices of political regimes.<sup>28</sup> While these comparisons draw on the same colonial histories, they reinterpret them to inform the struggle for Palestinian liberation. Over the past several decades, comparisons have become increasingly central to the growing international movement for Palestine. According to John Collings, “the global importance of Palestine seems

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<sup>23</sup> Ronald Storrs, *Orientalisms* (London: Nicholson & Watson, 1937), 405.

<sup>24</sup> David Cronin, “Winston Churchill sent the Black and Tans to Palestine,” *The Irish Times*, 19 May 2017, <https://www.irishtimes.com/culture/books/winston-churchill-sent-the-black-and-tans-to-palestine-1.3089140>.

<sup>25</sup> Ronald W. Zweig, *David Ben-Gurion: Politics and Leadership in Israel* (London: Routledge, 2013), 116.

<sup>26</sup> Mahmood Mamdani, “Settler colonialism: Then and now.” *Critical Inquiry* 41, no. 3 (2015): 610.

<sup>27</sup> Stoler, “Tense and tender ties.”

<sup>28</sup> Ann Laura Stoler, *Carnal knowledge and imperial power: Race and the intimate in colonial rule* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010), xiii.

to be increasing in inverse proportion to the amount of territory controlled by Palestinians,” and as I show in this thesis, comparison is a key way through which this importance is emphasized and mobilized.<sup>29</sup>

International solidarity first became prominent in the 1960s, when global anti-colonial and civil rights struggles coalesced with the 1967 Six-Day-War in Palestine. As I discuss in the subsequent chapters, linkages were forged between Palestinian liberation organizations and overseas resistance movements, including the Irish Republican Army (IRA) and the African National Congress (ANC), which continued into the 1970s and 1980s. In 1971, the *keffiyeh*, the Palestinian checkered headscarf also known as the “Arafat scarf,” was seen in an anti-Vietnam War demonstration in Washington DC.<sup>30</sup> By the 1980s, it “could be spotted in virtually any antiwar, antinuclear, and antiapartheid protest.”<sup>31</sup> It was in the 1990s, however, that the Palestinian struggle reached an even broader demographic, when footage of the First *Intifada* was broadcast on televisions worldwide. This footage, most aptly captured by the stone-throwing child against the heavily armed Israeli soldier, was influential in transforming the international perception of the Palestinian liberation struggle by exposing the stark unevenness of force.<sup>32</sup>

In the early 2000s, during and after the Second *Intifada*, explicit international solidarity movements for Palestine were founded and activists from abroad started traveling to the Occupied Territories. These “internationals,” as they became known by Palestinians, were often tied to the post-Oslo NGO industry, but also participated in grassroots organizing.<sup>33</sup> Internationals started joining protests in the West Bank and Gaza, sometimes as part of a wider global justice movement.<sup>34</sup> In 2003, Edward Said wrote that the struggle for the Palestinian people had now become “a byword for emancipation.”<sup>35</sup> At the same time, internationals were sometimes critiqued for their “political tourism” or for reinforcing white privilege through paternalistic ideas of “helping.”<sup>36</sup> In later years, strategies of physical presence in the Occupied Territories started to lose ground to other modes of international solidarity, such as boycotting Israeli goods or campaigning against the complicity of Western governments and companies.

It is in this context of trying to transform the understanding and awareness of the Palestinian struggle internationally that comparisons have gained a central role, not only for Palestinians who draw connections with their own cause, but also for those outside of Palestine. Not only do “increasing numbers of people around the world feel that they have a stake in the Palestinian struggle,” they have also come to see their own political struggles reflected in what is happening in Palestine and draw parallels to elicit attention and mobilize support.<sup>37</sup> In John Collins’ words, the Palestinian struggle has come to form “the hub of a global web that not only connects people of diverse experiences, but also provides an idiom within which to see important

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<sup>29</sup> John Collins, *Global Palestine* (London: Hurst Publishers, 2011), 1.

<sup>30</sup> This traditional Arab headdress became associated with Palestinian resistance when it was worn by guerilla fighters during the Great Revolt of the 1930, when they rose up against the British administration of Mandate Palestine.

<sup>31</sup> Rae Lynn Schwartz-DuPre and Shelby Scott, “Postcolonial Globalized Communication and Rapping the Kufiyya,” *Communication, Culture & Critique* 8, no. 3 (2015): 341.

<sup>32</sup> Edward Said, “Intifada and Independence,” *Social Text* 22 (1989): 26; and Seth Anziska, *Preventing Palestine: A Political History from Camp David to Oslo* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2018), 254.

<sup>33</sup> Linda Tabar, “From Third World Internationalism to ‘the Internationals’: The Transformation of Solidarity with Palestine,” *Third World Quarterly* 38, no. 2 (2017): 415.

<sup>34</sup> John Collins, “Between acceleration and occupation: Palestine and the struggle for global justice,” *Studies in Social Justice* 4, no. 2 (2010): 199-215.

<sup>35</sup> Edward Said, “Dignity, Solidarity and the Penal Colony,” *Counterpunch*, September 25 (2003).

<sup>36</sup> Tabar, “From Third World Internationalism to ‘the Internationals’”; Sophia Stamatopoulou-Robbins, “The Joys and Dangers of Solidarity in Palestine: Prosthetic Engagement in an Age of Reparations,” *CR: The New Centennial Review* 8, no. 2 (2008): 111-160.

<sup>37</sup> John Collins, “Global Palestine: A Collision for Our Time,” *Critique: Critical Middle Eastern Studies* 16, no. 1 (2007): 3.

commonalities among those experiences.”<sup>38</sup> Comparisons with Palestine have emerged in many places in the world, including Algeria,<sup>39</sup> Bosnia,<sup>40</sup> Chile,<sup>41</sup> Cuba,<sup>42</sup> Ferguson,<sup>43</sup> Kashmir,<sup>44</sup> the Mexican borderlands,<sup>45</sup> and, as will be the focus of this study: Ireland, South Africa, and Turtle Island.

I have selected these research sites based on the prevalence of comparisons with Palestine and their importance within political organizing. These are contexts in which people commonly draw comparisons between Palestine and their own political situation, whether in the past or in the present, and where these comparisons are institutionalized, whether through formal political organizations or through grassroots movements. In Ireland, although the links with the IRA go back several decades, comparisons became most prominent from the 1990s, when the peace process after the “Troubles” coincided with the Oslo Accords. In South Africa, they again go back some way, emerging in the apartheid period and becoming more salient since 2005 with the founding of the Palestinian Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions (BDS) movement, which was modelled after the anti-apartheid struggle. In Turtle Island, comparisons have become deployed by Indigenous political movements since 2014, within the context of the resurgence of Indigenous resistance. In these three contexts, comparisons are frequently used in media outlets and within political initiatives.

The order of the empirical chapters follows the temporal sequence of the emergence of the comparisons: starting with Ireland (Chapter 4), followed by South Africa (Chapter 5), and then Turtle Island (Chapter 6). This is not meant to portray them within a neat historical trajectory. While these comparisons often emerge out of a historical relationship to the Palestinian struggle or in response to particular historical events, they evolve on the basis of contemporary political priorities and concerns. Therefore, in each of these locales, comparisons continue to change over time, adapt to new circumstances, and are given new meanings. The empirical chapter on Palestine (Chapter 7) weaves these comparative stories together and examines how they are weighed, judged, negotiated, rejected, and creatively reworked within Palestine itself.

### 3. Research Methods: Participant Observation

In studying comparisons to Palestine, I conducted participant observation in Palestine, Ireland, South Africa, and Turtle Island. I had initially intended to conduct this study through prolonged periods of field research. Yet, due to the circumstances of the Covid-19 pandemic, I opted for

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<sup>38</sup> Collins, *Global Palestine*, 127-128.

<sup>39</sup> Arthur Asseraf, ““A New Israel” Colonial Comparisons and the Algerian Partition That Never Happened,” *French Historical Studies* 41, no. 1 (2018): 95-120; Olivia C Harrison, “Staging Palestine in France-Algeria: Popular Theater and the Politics of Transcolonial Comparison,” *Social Text* 30, no. 3 (2012): 27-47.

<sup>40</sup> Joseph Schechla, “Bosnia and Palestine: So Close and Yet So Far,” *Al Majdal Magazine*, Autumn 2007, <https://www.badiil.org/publications/al-majdal/issues/items/335.html>.

<sup>41</sup> Tahia Abdel Nasser, “Palestine and Latin America: Lina Meruane’s *Volverse Palestina* and Nathalie Handal’s *La Estrella Invisible*,” *Journal of Postcolonial Writing* 54, no. 2 (2018): 239-253.

<sup>42</sup> Robert Austin Henry, “Global Palestine: International Solidarity and the Cuban Connection,” *Journal of Holy Land and Palestine Studies* 18, no. 2 (2019): 239-262.

<sup>43</sup> Kristian Davis Bailey, “Black-Palestinian solidarity in the Ferguson-Gaza era,” *American Quarterly* 67, no. 4 (2015): 1017-1026; Jon Dart, “From Ferguson to Gaza. Sport, political sensibility, and the Israel/Palestine conflict in the age of Black Lives Matter,” *European Journal for Sport and Society* 19, no. 2 (2022): 151-169.

<sup>44</sup> Goldie Osuri, “Kashmir and Palestine. The Story of Two Occupations,” *Al Jazeera*, 24 August 2016, <https://www.aljazeera.com/amp/opinions/2016/8/24/kashmir-and-palestine-the-story-of-two-occupations>; Ather Zia, ““Their wounds are our wounds”: a case for affective solidarity between Palestine and Kashmir,” *Identities* 27, no. 3 (2020): 357-375.

<sup>45</sup> Hana Masri, ““From Palestine to Mexico, all the walls have got to go”: rhetorical bordering as transnational settler colonial project,” *Communication and Critical/Cultural Studies* 18, no. 1 (2021): 85-93.

shorter-term field visits and more fragmentary data-collection as part of a patchwork ethnographic approach.<sup>46</sup> In this section, I describe the fieldwork visits I conducted as part of this study and discuss my approach to participant observation.

In Palestine, I conducted six weeks of fieldwork from April-May 2019. Initially, this was intended as a first exploratory visit. During this visit, I took part in activism through the International Solidarity Movement (ISM), the Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions (BDS) movement, and the Negev Coexistence Forum for Civil Equality (NCF). I stayed mostly in Ramallah, but also spent shorter periods of time in Jerusalem (*Al-Quds*), Hebron (*Al-Khalil*), and Beersheba (*Bir Seb'a*). Additionally, I traveled throughout the West Bank and took part in activist activities alongside the Gaza fence. This visit allowed me to see, hear, and feel the reality of the Israeli occupation, and was crucial in allowing me to relate to interviewees in later stages of the project. While I had intended to return to Palestine during the last phase of the project, I was unable to do so because of the disruption the Covid-19 pandemic caused to the project timeline.

In Ireland, I conducted four weeks of field research in June 2021. I took part in events organized by prominent Irish activist movements for Palestine, including the Ireland Palestine Solidarity Committee (IPSC), BDS Belfast, and the first meeting of a newly founded group: Cairde Palestine. I spent the most time in Cork, Dublin, and Belfast. In Belfast, I stayed at the house of a key organizer, located just off the Falls Road, in the historical heart of the republican area of the city. While the participant observation conducted was more limited than initially intended due to Covid-related restrictions on travel and social interaction, I was able to gather insights from participating in a wide range of activities, including demonstrations, other protest actions, meetings, and informal gatherings.

In South Africa, I conducted four weeks of research from February-March 2022. I attended events organized by South African activist movements for Palestine, namely the Palestine Solidarity Campaign (PSC), the Palestine Solidarity Alliance (PSA), and the wider South African BDS Coalition. These events were held in Cape Town, Johannesburg, and Pretoria. The events I attended were the first physical gatherings for Palestine taking place in South Africa after the lockdowns of the Covid-19 pandemic. While the attendance will likely have been more limited due to people's concerns about the spread of the virus, people seemed eager to (re)connect, and I was therefore able to gather insights in a variety of social settings, including public lectures, meetings, and community events.

In Turtle Island, I conducted two fieldwork visits. Initially, fieldwork was planned for March 2020 in Ontario during Israeli Apartheid Week (IAW). IAW 2020 would host several events on Indigenous – Palestinian connections, many of which were related to Indigenous protests against the Coastal Gaslink Pipeline, which is discussed in more detail in Chapter 6, and wider Indigenous struggles. I was intending to attend public events, demonstrations, poetry readings, and meetings in Toronto, Waterloo, Hamilton, and Kingston. Yet, after arriving in Toronto and conducting a few days of research there, I was forced to cancel the fieldwork trip due to the rapidly changing circumstances of the Covid-19 pandemic. Unfortunately, this trip did not provide enough information for the empirical analysis.

Therefore, in March 2022, I went on an additional two-week fieldwork trip to New Mexico. I adapted the fieldwork location based on where joint Indigenous and Palestinian organizing was mostly happening. In Albuquerque and Santa Fe, I joined public events and

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<sup>46</sup> Günel, Varma, and Watanabe, "A Manifesto for Patchwork Ethnography."

demonstrations for Palestine organized by the Southwest Coalition for Palestine and Samidoun Albuquerque, endorsed and attended by Native organizations such as the Red Nation and the Red Ant Collective. The events I attended were the first physical gatherings for Palestine taking place in New Mexico since the start of the Covid-19 pandemic. While Indigenous organizers in New Mexico had been very careful with physical gatherings due to the pandemic, especially because they often live in multigenerational living arrangements with more vulnerable elders, the events were largely held outside, and very well attended by people from a variety of Indigenous and Palestinian movements.

In the context of my participant-observation, I presented myself as someone who is sympathetic to and had previously been engaged in activism for Palestine. The role of the participant-observer is often characterized as a dialectic between an “insider” and an “outsider” role. Insiders are seen as part of the group that is studied and are therefore able access more intimate forms of knowledge, whereas outsiders are not, and are therefore “able to notice as unusual and therefore draw into analysis or challenge the very things that insiders take for granted.”<sup>47</sup> Yet, in the context of this research, I conceived of my role as more fluid, and dependent on my emotional relations with others. In some cases, I was able to get close to people and share a mutual understanding, whereas in others, the relationship remained more distant. As I have argued elsewhere, I therefore prefer to speak of intercorporeality than positionality, meaning that I understand my research role as a fragile and dynamic outcome of bodily relations with others rather than as a fixed position.<sup>48</sup> While the ways in which others came to read me was undoubtedly informed by characteristics, such as my age, gender, race, sexuality, and ability, these characteristics did not determine whether I, as a researcher, would develop the bonds that lead to more intimate knowledge.

In research on political organizing, shared views and commitments are important modes of establishing relations with others. Field settings vary “in the degree to which neutrality of moderate involvement is possible” and in strongly partisan settings such as political movements, intense commitment is often expected.<sup>49</sup> My prior experience in activism and overall support for the aims of the movements in which I participated generally facilitated my connections with people within the activist communities I entered, yet it was also sometimes questioned. In some cases, organizations vetted me first by asking me questions about my research, my activist experiences, or my personal commitments. My knowledge of common activist practices for social organization, such as consent-based decision making or affinity groups, also meant that I could blend in more easily, without disturbing the usual state of affairs.

#### **4. Research Methods: Interviews**

In addition to these periods of participant observation, I conducted in-depth interviews. I conducted a total of 60 interviews, roughly 15 in each research site (see the Appendix). In Palestine, I selected the interviewees based on their prominence in political or community organizing, journalism, and scholarship. In Ireland, South Africa, and Turtle Island, I selected the interviewees based on their participation in organizations for Palestinian liberation and ideally, also with some experience in local organizing or political affairs. Interviewees in these locations

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<sup>47</sup> Van Wingerden, “Unmastering Research,” 6.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., 1-17.

<sup>49</sup> Barrie Thome, “Political activist as participant observer: Conflicts of commitment in a study of the draft resistance movement of the 1960’s,” *Symbolic Interaction* 2, no. 1 (1979): 73.

include activists, scholars, policy makers, religious leaders, and others. In this section, I provide an overview of my strategies for finding interviewees, and my approach to conducting the interviews.

I used a snowball strategy to identify potential interviewees in each research location. This strategy was helpful to identify potential interviewees, but even more so to establish contact with them. As I was looking to speak to people involved in political work, I was aware that I might be regarded with some suspicion. Being introduced to these people through someone they knew and trusted proved to be very important. Through my initial fieldwork visit to Palestine, I had become acquainted with Palestinian organizers. These organizers put me in touch with people they trusted in Ireland, South Africa, and Turtle Island. Because I was recommended by Palestinian organizers, people in these locations were more likely to want to speak to me. They sometimes mentioned the mutual contact in Palestine as the main reason they were willing to be interviewed. These interviewees then referred me through to other local contacts.

Aside from this snowball strategy, I looked for additional interviewees that could provide different perspectives. In each context, I identified the most active organizers in the area through social media and movement websites. Sometimes, I conducted more specific searches. In South Africa, I was mostly introduced to men from the Muslim community as potential interviewees through my snowball strategy. I learned later that this reflected the prominent role of men in organizing for Palestine in South Africa, as well as the continued segregation of communities after the formal end of apartheid. After having conducted a certain number of interviews, I reached out to additional demographics. In Turtle Island, I initially did not depend on a snowball strategy. I was especially interested in speaking to people from Indigenous communities, and my contacts did not have many acquaintances there. While I was able to speak to organizers from different movements, I had to contact a much higher number of people in order to reach the same number of interviewees due to the lower response rate. The combination of a snowball strategy and a more specific targeted approach allowed me to speak to a variety of different people.

The interviews were partly semi-structured, and partly unstructured. In the first part of any interview, I asked questions based on a topic guide. These questions were important not only because of the direct answer, but even more so because they were intended to give me a sense of the interviewee's background, their present-day lifeworld, and the most important people in it. I did not ask about these things directly but would ask questions that allowed interviewees to tell stories about important events and memories in their life. In the second, open-ended part of the interview, I asked follow-up questions based on what people had told me, focusing specifically on the comparisons they had made. In many cases, these questions allowed me to gain a deeper understanding of the emotional resonance of particular issues. In this part of the interview, I also used various spontaneous prompts, for example by asking an interviewee to reflect on an opinion or reflection someone else had shared with me. In this way, I was able to get a sense of important tensions and disagreements.

Due to the circumstances of the pandemic, I conducted around 75% of the interviews online. Halfway through my PhD process, I did not know whether I would be able to conduct any field research. For this reason, I came to think of the online interviews as the main sources of information. While I was able to conduct field research in the end, the online interviews remained a core part of the overall project. This had an important downside, which was that the physical distance between me and the interviewees sometimes resulted in more emotional

distance. This was especially the case when there were connection problems, which occasionally happened, especially with interviewees based in South Africa and Gaza.<sup>50</sup>

Yet, there were also upsides to conducting online interviews. As I conducted the recordings from my home, I was able to guarantee the required conditions for sound recordings. The most important upsides only became clear later on, when I was able to go on fieldwork. Having had extensive online conversations with people prior to my arrival meant I already had a lot of background knowledge. I knew where to go, and what to pay particular attention to. Additionally, people had already gotten to know me. When I arrived, they offered to show me around, to host me in their homes, to take me to specific events and meetings, or to introduce me to other people. While my fieldwork trips were shorter than I had initially intended, I was immediately embedded in the communities I was researching through this prior online contact.

In conducting the interviews, I used a relational approach. This meant that I conceived of the relationship between me and the interviewee as fundamental to the interview itself. In reflecting on this relationship, I draw upon Lee Ann Fujii's identification of practical elements that go into relational interview exchanges.<sup>51</sup> Fujii underlines active listening, which for me meant not only listening to what the interviewee said, but also to what they did not say, and to their body language. As part of the interview, I asked about important events and memories in someone's life. In order to do so, I found it important to build a trusting relationship. In practical terms, I tried to be an active listener by showing empathy and sometimes reflecting on how something an interviewee said made me feel, establishing reciprocity. As Elizabeth A. Hoffmann conveys, which and how much emotions to show in interviews are significant decisions, which depend on shifts in the interviewer-interviewee relationship.<sup>52</sup> I also paid particular attention to the gaps, silences, and inconsistencies in people's stories. In some cases, especially when speaking about traumatic experiences, these proved to be of critical importance, as I discuss in the empirical chapters.

Fujii also considers the importance of learning to speak the language of interviewee as a way of establishing a closer relationship with someone.<sup>53</sup> This sometimes includes learning a particular language, but for me, it primarily meant becoming familiar with an interviewee's lexicon. As a native Dutch and fluent English speaker with some proficiency in Arabic, my interviews were all conducted in English, with occasional phrases in Afrikaans and Levantine Arabic. Even so, becoming familiar with interviewees' lexicon proved to be less straightforward than I assumed. I only learned over time through my relations with others what certain terms meant and how to use them. I learned, for instance, about the term "48," which Palestinians and solidarity activists tend to use to refer to Israel, denoting the year the Israeli state was founded while not normalizing the settler colonial project. I found that it was important to gain familiarity with how interviewees talk about the world, as this allowed me to more intimately understand their lifeworlds. For this reason, I adopt the language used within the communities I have researched and clarify the key terms at the beginning of each empirical chapter.

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<sup>50</sup> South Africans sometimes experience load-shedding, which is a way of distributing the demand for electrical power through scheduled power outages. Gazans similarly face power outages as a result of the Israeli blockade.

<sup>51</sup> Lee Ann Fujii, *Interviewing in social science research: A relational approach* (London: Routledge, 2017), 4-7.

<sup>52</sup> Elizabeth A. Hoffmann, "Open-ended interviews, power, and emotional labor," *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography* 36, no. 3 (2007): 318-346.

<sup>53</sup> Fujii, *Interviewing in social science research*, 4-5.

Relational interviewing is a process of trial and error, and Fujii suggests seeing mistakes as opportunities to establish a closer relationship in an interview.<sup>54</sup> In some cases, I was corrected by interviewees when I used language that did not fit their experience. This was the case, for example, when I used the term “Northern Ireland.” For many Irish republicans I spoke to, this is a colonial phrase that legitimizes the British occupation of the North. Instead, they use the term “the North of Ireland.” Yet, it is precisely such mistakes that can also provide valuable insights, as it is in these moments that interviewees or other research participants can clarify their views on particular terms and perspectives. To research participants, these learning moments also signified that I took their experience seriously, and that the research process was, in some key respects, a two-way encounter. In this way, as Julia Gallagher writes, interviews can be catastrophic in the most productive way, as they force researchers to re-evaluate their preconceived notions, research frameworks, conceptions of the other, and sometimes, of themselves too.<sup>55</sup>

## 5. Ethical Commitments

As this research focuses specifically on catastrophic comparisons, many of my exchanges with research participants touched upon traumatic events in people’s lives and personal views and circumstances. For me, this meant that I felt a strong sense of responsibility in how I handled the information. In this section, I discuss the emotional, political, and procedural dimensions of my ethical conduct.

My primary ethical concern was handling the emotional nature of the topic by being kind and caring towards research participants. For me, this not only meant empathetic listening, as discussed previously, but also establishing boundaries. While I have previously been trained in peer supporting skills, I am not a mental health professional. Therefore, I tried to stay within the bounds of what people seemed comfortable discussing by asking follow-up questions, but never pressuring participants to disclose more. I also reminded people that if they shared something in the moment but wanted to retract it at a later time, this would be possible until the point of publication. The opposite also happened, in that people would contact me later to share important memories that had come back to them as a result of our conversation. This was an important reminder that a research encounter is always a real, lived exchange that intervenes in people’s lives.

I also found it important to be transparent in my own political and intellectual commitments. As discussed before, I approached this research as someone who is sympathetic to and had already previously been engaged in activism for Palestine. At the same time, I see this project not as an activist endeavor in and of itself. In some ways, the gap between activism and scholarship is unavoidable, in that scholars have institutional ties and commitments that tend to be different to or at odds with the beliefs and practices of activist communities. Yet, some scholars explicitly take up an in-between role as “scholar-activist,” measuring their research “primarily in terms of its contribution to collective struggles against oppression.”<sup>56</sup> While this thesis is concerned with the struggle for Palestinian liberation, I conceive this project mainly as an academic study into the use of comparisons. The findings will be relevant to those deploying comparisons within activist practices and speak specifically to those in the movement for Palestine, but at the same time, they are directed at a scholarly audience with potentially different

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<sup>54</sup> Ibid., 5-6.

<sup>55</sup> Gallagher, “Interviews as catastrophic encounters,” 447.

<sup>56</sup> Eric Herring, “Remaking the Mainstream: The Case for Activist IR Scholarship,” *Millennium* 35, no. 1 (2006): 116.



intellectual and political commitments. In other words, while I am broadly supportive of my interlocutors, I maintain partial distance for the sake of critical engagement and analysis.

In this way, I follow Lara Montesinos Coleman, who argues that the gap between activism and scholarship, and therefore the dual purpose of this study, does not need to be resolved. It is precisely the back-and-forth movement that provides opportunities for intellectual engagement. Indeed, “to attempt to ‘close the gaps’ in modes of thought too easily severs analysis from the tensions and complexities of struggle.”<sup>57</sup> Maintaining partial distance enables the researcher to excavate “how resisting subjects are made, how struggles are managed, contained, or enmeshed within relations of domination, and how our own knowledge practices are likewise a product of our imbrication within those power relations.”<sup>58</sup> This is precisely where scholarship comes in, as an engaged yet partially distanced mode of reflection, which adds specific insights. In my case, this partial engagement and distance involved balancing and negotiating institutional attachments and requirements with the obligations to and possibilities of connection with others in the field.

This balancing and negotiating influenced the ethical decisions I made in the process. As part of my ethical framework, I obtained informed consent from all research participants, following the LSE’s Research Ethics Policy.<sup>59</sup> This included interviewees as well as people I spent considerable time with in the context of participant observation. Due to practical limitations, I was not able to obtain informed consent at public events or large gatherings.<sup>60</sup> Yet, I quickly noticed that written consent forms made some of my respondents uneasy. While people were generally happy to speak to me and to be included in the project, they sometimes expressed a distrust with bureaucratization and paper trails, as this often runs counter to modes of organization in activist settings. The first time that I introduced the consent forms during my participant observation in the West Bank, people’s body languages changed, revealing their discomfort. Over time, I decided to adapt my research to the specific environment, and to move from written consent forms to verbal consent. This allowed me to blend in a lot more, yet it also had ethical implications, as the process I adopted was more informal, and research participants had to rely on my verbal summary of the project, without a formal document that outlined important information.

Additionally, the balancing act between activist and scholarly engagement impacted my ethical decision making in conducting participant observation. The university safety assessments to obtain travel clearance demanded that I would steer away from demonstrations and other potentially dangerous situations. In terms of intellectual engagement, presence at these events would be interesting, but not strictly necessary. Yet, for the movements and organizations I joined as a participant observer, these situations were key moments of coming together. Being present in these situations was a central determinant of belonging, and so for me, it guided whether I was seen as a collaborator or as an (introducing) researcher. As I argue elsewhere, the friction between conflicting requirements and expectations can give way to a continuous

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<sup>57</sup> Lara Montesinos Coleman, "Ethnography, Commitment, and Critique: Departing from Activist Scholarship," *International Political Sociology* 9, no. 3 (2015): 271.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, 277.

<sup>59</sup> *London School of Economics and Political Science*, "Research Ethics Policy and Procedures," accessed 22 November 22, <https://info.lse.ac.uk/staff/services/Policies-and-procedures/Assets/Documents/resEthPolPro.pdf>.

<sup>60</sup> Discussed in more depth by Patrick McCurdy and Julie Uldam, "Connecting participant observation positions: Toward a reflexive framework for studying social movements," *Field Methods* 26, no. 1 (2014): 40-55.

readjustment, as it did in my case.<sup>61</sup> In the context of this project, the friction meant that I mostly adhered to the university safety prescriptions, but sometimes did not, based on my own judgment in each situation.

A final, more general procedural issue concerns my data safety measures, which I followed strictly throughout the research process. In order to protect the identity of my research participants, I kept all audio and transcript files, consent forms, and fieldnotes in an encrypted folder, and destroyed all physical copies of the documents. I initially also committed to pseudonymizing all research participants to avoid putting their physical safety or professional status in jeopardy. Yet, over time, I found that most research participants preferred to be referred to by name in sharing their views. Therefore, I chose to let research participants decide, and have indicated my use of pseudonyms through footnotes.

## 6. Mode of Analysis

In this final section, I discuss the analytical steps I took to analyze the research findings. Based on the overall aims of the project, my most important focal point in analyzing fieldwork and interview findings was the use of comparisons. To analyze this information, I used an affective-narrative approach which is intimately related to the overall aims of the project. To understand how comparisons translate political experiences, I paid particular attention to the affective charge of the material. In writing up the fieldwork notes and interview transcripts, I indicated whether I perceived a particular emotional reaction on the part of my interlocutor in speaking about particular events or experiences. Sometimes people would state explicitly how something made them feel, but more often, it was conveyed through particular imaginary or intonations. In analyzing the material, I paid particular attention to selecting quotes that conveyed this emotional resonance. I then contextualized the quotes by drawing upon other parts of an interview or conversation, so that the reader can come to understand the emotional charge of a passage in relation to the person's personal experiences.

In conducting the analysis, this means that I also needed to reflect on how the material made me feel. Fieldwork exchanges and interviews should not only be seen as relational and affective encounters at the moment they take place, but also afterwards, at the time of analysis, when they continue to reverberate emotionally.<sup>62</sup> Feeling the affective charge of the material myself allowed me to write about the more subliminal dimensions of the comparisons people made. As Sherryl Kleinman and Martha A. Copp write: "Ignoring or suppressing feelings are emotional strategies that divert our attention from the cues that ultimately help us understand those we study."<sup>63</sup> It was precisely by tuning into my own emotional world that I was able to get a sense of the affective significance of my interlocutors' comparisons.

To study how comparisons (re)draw political relations, I examined the relational linkages that emerged through people's comparative stories. To do so, the narrative aspect of my analysis allowed for the processual analysis of events, actions and actors. As Jaber F. Gubrium and James A. Holstein argue, "narrative analysis centered on how stories reveal the relational selves of

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<sup>61</sup> Van Wingerden, "Unmastering Research," 9.

<sup>62</sup> Bilgin Ayata, Cilja Harders, Derya Özkaya, and Dina Wahba, "Interviews as situated affective encounters: a relational and processual approach for empirical research on affect, emotion and politics," in *Analyzing Affective Societies: Methods and Methodologies*, ed. Antje Kahl (Abingdon: Routledge, 2009), 63-77.

<sup>63</sup> Sherryl Kleinmann and Martha A. Copp, *Emotions and Fieldwork* (Thousand Oaks: Sage, 1993), 33.

storytellers.”<sup>64</sup> Stories, in this sense, are “viewed as windows on distinctive social worlds.”<sup>65</sup> My analysis was primarily focused on the processual linkages between contexts, events, and experiences as they are constructed through comparative narratives. Through comparisons, research participants draw relations between political contexts, time periods, and people that are construed as similar to or different from the self. I pay particular attention to how comparisons are used as narrative devices in a horizontal sense, by creating closeness or distance with these others.

I analyze these narratives in a contrapuntal way, with different voices coexisting simultaneously.<sup>66</sup> The aim is to disrupt any “common sense” perspective by bringing into view an ensemble of all kinds of voices, whether more dominant, more submerged, or in-between.<sup>67</sup> In some cases, these voices coalesce to form a more collective perspective, yet in other cases, there are strong disagreements. I endeavored to give a sense of the spectrum of comparative statements made, their frequency, and the most important underlying tensions. I did this by grouping comparative statements.<sup>68</sup> Whenever a research participant deployed a comparison, I highlighted the text and moved it to a separate file. I then clustered the passages according to how the comparison was used, what was compared, or what the comparison was trying to convey. In analyzing the passages, I focused on the mutual linkages and disagreement between comparative statements and positioned them within a narrative order that drew multiple stories together.

Finally, my analysis of how comparisons (re)compose political issues brings these affective and narrative insights together, with a particular focus on what my interlocutors’ experiences and stories can tell us about how the Palestinian struggle becomes known, created, and acted upon. Therefore, my analysis centers on how comparisons between Palestine on the one hand and Ireland, South Africa, and Turtle Island on the other are negotiated in everyday conversations and debates. Some comparisons prove stickier than others and are composed into widely accepted narratives. To analyze these negotiations, I have again grouped different views and insights, and identified common narratives. My primary focus here is on understanding how comparisons with Ireland, South Africa, and Turtle Island shape the possibilities for imagining Palestinian liberation, both for movements on the ground and for wider international activism.

I also zoom in on how comparisons become built into the reality of the Palestinian struggle. I draw here on my interlocutors’ narrative recollections and my own embodied experiences as a participant observer to analyze how acts of comparison are incorporated into political ideas, practices, organizations, or landscapes. I do this by paying particular attention to moments of transformation, such as when an idea or practice changes, when organizations are founded, or when a physical object is renamed. While more explicit object-oriented analyses could be mobilized to gain deeper insights into the material life of comparisons, matter and

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<sup>64</sup> Jaber F. Gubrium and James A. Holstein, "Narrative ethnography," in *Handbook of Emergent Methods*, ed. Sharlene Nagy Hesse-Biber and Patricia Leavy (New York: Guildford, 2008): 244.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid.

<sup>66</sup> Ayelet Harel-Shalev and Shir Daphna-Tekoah, "Bringing women's voices back in: conducting narrative analysis in IR," *International Studies Review* 18, no. 2 (2016): 175.

<sup>67</sup> Geeta Chowdhry, "Edward Said and contrapuntal reading: Implications for critical interventions in international relations," *Millennium* 36, no. 1 (2007): 101-116.

<sup>68</sup> I did not code parts of speech, as in thematic analysis, but manually selected and categorized relevant parts of the fieldnotes and interview transcripts.

narrative should not be understood as separate realms, but as deeply connected.<sup>69</sup> Narratives are not only stories that people tell but they also *do* things. Focusing on affective experiences and narrative accounts, therefore, allows me to study how comparisons, as everyday utterances, are connected to the actual stuff of international relations through chains of matter and meaning.

### **Conclusion**

This chapter laid the groundwork for the ethnography of comparisons in the coming chapters. This is where the research choices will truly come to life, as they guide how the reader can come to know, understand, and feel the significance of the comparisons that are made. In this chapter, I have described the historical background of the struggle for Palestinian liberation as the starting point of this study and explained its relevance as a case for studying international comparisons. In the subsequent chapters, we will see how these historical events are renegotiated and reinterpreted through comparisons with Ireland, South Africa, and Turtle Island. My mode of research, as presented in this chapter, is intended to allow the reader to inhabit these various acts of comparison, both analytically and emotionally. The chapters that follow present different and sometimes contradictory voices, which disrupt any straightforward comparative story, and instead show the fragmentary making and doing of international relations.

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<sup>69</sup> Brett Smith and Javier Monforte, "Stories, new materialism and pluralism: Understanding, practising and pushing the boundaries of narrative analysis," *Methods in Psychology* 2 (2020): 100016.

## Chapter 4 – A Proxy Palestine in Ireland: Comparability in Conflict

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The first night we arrived in Palestine, a young 26-year-old lad got shot at a checkpoint in Bethlehem, not far from our hotel. [They] rang us at about 12 o'clock midnight. We were in bed. And [they] said: would you come to the funeral? [They] asked us to bring an Irish flag if we had one, which we did. We had plenty. We went to the hospital as they took the body out. We drove with the funeral cars to [the lad's] village and we raised the Irish flag out through the top of the car. They took the body up to his mother's house and we marched back down to the mosque where they were going to say the prayers. ... When we got there, there were three old men who came up to us. I remember one in particular; he was - maybe, probably - around 70. He was a hardened man and obviously living in the shadows of a big Israeli settlement. He saw our tricolor, our flag, and he said: "Are you from Ireland?" And I said: "Yes." And then he put out his hand, he hugged me, and he said: "We remember Bobby Sands."<sup>1</sup>

### Introduction

Often deemed the "most pro-Palestinian country in Europe", Irish support for Palestine is widespread as the Israeli occupation and annexation of Palestine is understood as deeply similar to the histories and experiences of British settler-colonialism in Ireland.<sup>2</sup> Comparisons between Ireland and Palestine are enacted in unapologetically material ways, with Irish republicans in Derry and Belfast neighborhoods in the North of Ireland flying Palestinian flags and British loyalists adopting Israeli flags. It is the similarity between the histories and present-day realities in Ireland and Palestine that is often mentioned as the driving force behind Irish support for Palestine. This support is visible through countless local and national activist initiatives for Palestine and manifested through government narratives and policy.<sup>3</sup>

While prior studies have provided comparative analyses of the similarities between Palestine and Ireland, this chapter engages in comparative research of a different kind.<sup>4</sup> Rather than a comparative analysis as such, this chapter forms the first part of my ethnography of comparisons. With an ethnographic sensibility, I try to understand how and why activists and politicians in Ireland compare their own situation to that in Palestine. In this chapter and the chapters on South Africa and Turtle Island that follow, I engage with my interlocutors as active makers (rather than as objects) of comparison. Through participant observation and interviews with Irish activists and politicians, I identify modes of comparison with Palestine in thought and in practice. In this chapter, I examine these comparisons, with a particular focus on how they translate political experiences and (re)draw political relationships.

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<sup>1</sup> Digital interview with Brendan Barry from Cork, Ireland by author, 14 April 2021.

<sup>2</sup> E.g. *Al Jazeera*, "What's behind Ireland's support for Palestine?" 7 June 2021, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/6/7/whats-behind-irelands-support-for-palestine>; *Al Araby*, "A History of Ireland's support for Palestine," 17 June 2021, <https://english.alaraby.co.uk/analysis/history-irelands-support-palestine>; *Irish Times*, "Israel summons ambassador over Palestinian envoy upgrade", 26 January 2011, <https://www.irishtimes.com/news/israel-summons-ambassador-over-palestinian-envoy-upgrade-1.1279399>; *TRT World*, "Ireland: The most pro-Palestinian country in Europe?" 11 May 2021. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bnYB5Qc30fo>;

<sup>3</sup> E.g., The Irish Parliament's 2021 vote to condemn Israel's "de facto annexation" of Palestinian land was the first use of this phrase by a European Union government in relation to Israel. *Reuters*, "Ireland urges Israel to end 'de facto annexation' of Palestinian land, 25 May 2021, <https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/ireland-urges-israel-end-de-facto-annexation-palestinian-land-2021-05-25/>.

<sup>4</sup> For prior studies of the comparability of Ireland and Palestine, see Donald H. Akenson, *God's Peoples: Covenant and Land in South Africa, Israel, and Ulster* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1992); Lustick, *Unsettled States, Disputed Lands*; Mitchell, *Native vs. Settler*; Gidron, Katz, and Hasenfeld, eds., *Mobilizing for Peace*.

Activism for Palestine is most active and prominent in communities that contest British occupation and influence in Ireland. These communities are often referred to as “republican”, striving for the unity and independence of Ireland as a republic, or “nationalist”, referring to the struggle for the political independence and sovereignty of Ireland as a nation-state. In practice, these beliefs come together in the joint struggle for a united Ireland free from British control. In terms of associations, Irish republicanism is sometimes seen to be more radical or violent than Irish nationalism, through its history of militancy. In order to intimately understand the reality of British occupation and influence in Ireland for these communities, I adhere to language that is used by these communities. This means that when I use the term “Ireland”, this refers to the entire island, both South and North. To refer to the country of Ireland, I use the term: “the South of Ireland.” Interviewees also refer to it as “the Republic (of Ireland),” “the 26 counties” or “the Free State.” Finally, I talk about “the North of Ireland” rather than the British term “Northern Ireland”, reflecting that the North is part of Ireland itself. Occasionally, the North is also referred to by interviewees as “the (occupied) six counties”.

This chapter unfolds in five sections. The first section of this chapter identifies how the comparability between Ireland and Palestine is crafted in practice through evoking concrete events and experiences. It discusses how the historical experiences of settler-colonialism, occupation, and eventual partition are remembered in present-day Ireland and are mobilized in comparisons with Palestine. It also discusses how protest tactics of boycotts and hunger strikes comparatively emerge and take shape.

The second section of this chapter discusses time as a common axis of comparisons between Ireland and Palestine. It focuses specifically on comparisons between the speed, duration, and contemporaneousness of the occupations in Ireland and Palestine. The Israeli occupation in Palestine tends to be seen as an accelerated high-tech version of the British occupation. Comparisons are also made between the relatively short span of the occupation of Palestine (80 years), compared to that of Ireland (800 years). Most importantly, a contrast is created between Ireland as mostly a historical struggle and Palestine as a present-day one.

The third section of this chapter explores how comparisons with Palestine are more than merely historical as they continue to be lived and felt in the Irish present. This section makes sense of the more emotional, visceral, and involuntary connections to Palestine, showing that activists in Ireland can resonate with Palestine through experiences that we might call traumatic. It also finds that there is often a very direct though implicit connection between particular traumatic experiences and the type of work activists end up doing for Palestinian liberation. While the ways in which events of the Irish past that intrude into the present can partly be considered involuntary post-traumatic responses, I also argue that injustices perpetrated in Ireland are actively challenged, contested, and mobilized in the service of justice for Palestine.

The fourth section of this chapter interrogates how subliminal emotional responses to the occupation of Palestine are connected to the current political situation in Ireland. It shows that the way in which events in Palestine resonate with lived experiences differs for activists in the North and in the South of Ireland, but that these differences in experience are also reified through dominant narratives and vocabularies. In this section, I discuss how Northerners and Southerners in Ireland grapple with the realities of partition, alienation, and complex structures of complicity through their resonances with Palestine.

The fifth and final section of this chapter zooms in on the ways in which new connections between the North and the South and political groups across Ireland emerge

through comparisons with and activism for Palestine. It shows that comparisons with Palestine function as conduits through which Southern and Northern experiences of British imperialism and present-day occupation can become translated and reconnected. Especially in the North of Ireland, activism for Palestine also brings together groups of republicans and nationalists that have become divided after the Good Friday Agreement. However, these heightened sentiments and increasing connections also contribute to Palestine as a proxy for international antagonisms in the context of a seeming “peace.”

### 1. David and Goliath: Comparability between Ireland and Palestine

Arriving in Ireland, I encountered a very different kind of atmosphere of Palestine activism than I was used to in mainland Europe. At actions in Amsterdam, I usually received a range of responses, from lack of interest and active hostility to sympathy and support, but during demonstrations and protest actions in West Belfast I met such widespread enthusiasm, it almost caught me off guard. This was strengthened by the presence of Palestinian flags in most Irish cities I visited.<sup>5</sup> While I had known about Irish support for Palestine, it was different to *feel* it. This section discusses how comparability with Palestine is actively made in the streets of Ireland. As conceptualized in Chapter 2, the comparability between things, or in this case, political contexts, is actively made in practice. Practices of comparability involve bringing things together and making them equal, which can then provide a basis for differentiation.<sup>6</sup> This section focuses specifically on what histories, events, and experiences are conjured up in crafting comparability between Ireland and Palestine.

Irish comparability with Palestine is made on some streets rather than others. While support for Palestine is common in most areas in the South of Ireland, the North tells a different story. The history and politics of the political struggle in the North of Ireland can be grasped through the materiality and symbolism of two well-known roads in Belfast: The Falls Road and the Shankil Road. The Falls Road forms the heart of the republican communities of West Belfast. Here you find tricolors and revolutionary murals all around, as well as Palestinian flags adorning the lamp posts. By contrast, the Shankil Road looks quintessentially British, with Union Jack bunting banners crisscrossing the sides of the road. This is the center of the unionist and loyalist communities of Belfast. (Ulster) Unionists support the ongoing union between what they call Northern Ireland and the other constituent countries of the United Kingdom. Loyalism tends to be associated with a firmer position, especially through its links with paramilitarism, and also refers to a loyalty to the British monarchy, prior to British governments and institutions. In these communities, connections to Israel emanate from the perceived communality of interest in opposing terrorism, as well as a provocative response to the Ireland – Palestine connection.<sup>7</sup>

This section focuses specifically on the Ireland – Palestine connection and the ways in which comparability between these political contexts is crafted in republican and nationalist communities. Comparability is made in explicit ways, as activist Conor from Belfast expressed:

When I went over [to Palestine] the first time, one of my curiosities was to see what the similarities were with what I had experienced in my life and what’s happening over in Palestine at the moment. I was making a list and by the time I left, the list was as long as my arm.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> As part of my participant observation, I identified and documented the presence of Palestinian flags.

<sup>6</sup> Schinkel, "Making Climates Comparable," 377.

<sup>7</sup> Aaron Tapper, "Ireland's incendiary 'flag wars,'" *The Salon*, 18 July 2002, [https://www.salon.com/2002/07/18/ireland\\_2/](https://www.salon.com/2002/07/18/ireland_2/).

<sup>8</sup> Interview with Conor [pseudonym] from Belfast, Ireland by author, 14 June 2021.

In many other instances, as we will see throughout this chapter, comparisons are more implicit and sometimes involuntary. Whether implicitly or explicitly, these comparisons prove to be catastrophic in that they translate concrete experiences. In asking about connections to Palestine, I noticed that activists I met across Ireland typically fell back on a similar narrative theme, that of the underdog. “I think for Irish people there is this sympathy with the underdog,” they would say.<sup>9</sup> “They really take the side of the person who’s up against superior odds.”<sup>10</sup> In this narrative, Ireland and Palestine become the David that is up against Goliath, versions of which can also be found in Irish folklore.<sup>11</sup> The comparability of Ireland and Palestine in this sense, is that of two groups of people resisting the imperialism of great powers and global capital, supporting one another as they fight against all odds. This way of establishing comparability offers a narrative through which Ireland and Palestine become connected in anti-imperialism. Throughout this chapter, I unpack this narrative to look at the more concrete, contextual ways in which comparisons with Palestine take shape and function within the Irish political landscape.

Importantly, if we look at these comparisons in more detail, there are concrete events and experiences of catastrophe that are evoked to establish comparability between the British occupation of Ireland and the Israeli occupation of Palestine. In many cases, events in Irish history were established as comparable to the dispossession and displacement of the Palestinian population during the Nakba. In asking about how they could relate to Palestine, about a third of my interviewees referred back to the land clearances in the sixteenth and seventeenth century. This is when Irish land was confiscated by the English Crown and given to British settlers, with the aim of taking over, controlling, and anglicizing parts of Ireland.<sup>12</sup> These settlers were required to be English-speaking and Protestant, and they were to establish plantations that were intended as model farming communities. The establishment of the plantations led to the removal and execution of the existing ruling classes and their replacement by Anglican landowners.

The disenfranchisement of the existing community was further enforced by the seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Penal Laws, which barred the Catholic (e.g., Irish) population from land ownership and other means of political and economic power.<sup>13</sup> As Catherine, a very passionate activist from Derry said:

There is that similarity there with Palestine in the sense that there is this constant need and lust for land, stealing land. Putting farmers off their land to clear out for military zones. And then the land is used for these encroaching settlements which are getting bigger and bigger.<sup>14</sup> Whereas British imperialism in Ireland preceded the plantations, as I will discuss in section two, they form the starting point of organized settler-colonialism and can therefore be seen as the start of the present-day situation in (the North of) Ireland. The land clearances in Ireland therefore become crafted as comparable to the clearing of Palestinian land during the Nakba.

Another event that interviewees evoked as comparable to the situation in Palestine, is the 1921 truce that led to the partition of Ireland. The truce ended the 1919-1921 War of Independence in Ireland, waged between the Irish Republican Army (IRA) and British forces.<sup>15</sup> The War of Independence was a culmination of prior uprisings and rebellions by the Irish people

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<sup>9</sup> Interview with Sinn Fein City Councilor Mick Nugent from Cork, Ireland by author, 24 June 2021.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Millar, F. Graham, "The Celestial David and Goliath," *Journal of the Royal Astronomical Society of Canada* 89 (1995): 141.

<sup>12</sup> Nicholas Canny, *Making Ireland British, 1580-1650* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001).

<sup>13</sup> Samantha Howell, "From Oppression to Nationalism: The Irish Penal Laws of 1695," *Hoboniu* 14 (2016): 21-23.

<sup>14</sup> Digital interview with Catherine Hutton from Derry, Ireland by author, 17 March 2021.

<sup>15</sup> Jason K. Knirck, *Imagining Ireland's independence: the debates over the Anglo-Irish Treaty of 1921* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2006).



to reclaim their land and rights from the British, and was preceded by the 1916 Easter Rising, which, though ultimately unsuccessful, proclaimed Ireland as a free republic.<sup>16</sup> The truce resulted in the Anglo-Irish Treaty, which ended British rule in most of Ireland and led to the creation of the independent state of Ireland. This came at the expense, however, of the North, which was partitioned and remained part of the United Kingdom. As activist Cully from Cork said: “The 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the truce is coming up and you see now that the unionist parties are trying to celebrate it as ‘our birth’, whereas we would be looking at it almost like the Nakba.”<sup>17</sup> Comparability is hereby established between the 1921 partition of Ireland and the proposed-partition and expropriation of Palestine in 1947-1948.

Nearly all activists I encountered in Ireland also established comparability between the historical experiences of Ireland and Palestine through emphasizing the concrete material connections between both occupations. As we have seen in chapter two, comparisons do not only capture similar political dynamics but can only lay bare concrete historical and material connections that have hitherto been kept apart. Thereby, they can reveal the workings of power. The example that was mentioned in about half of the interviews was that of the Black and Tans, which were unemployed veterans that were then recruited to reinforce the British police during the Irish War of Independence. The Black and Tans gained a reputation for exceptional violence, including extrajudicial killings, torture, and attacks against civilians or civilian property.<sup>18</sup> After the truce, 650 former Black and Tans were signed over to serve in the British police in Mandate Palestine.

During the Arab Revolt in Palestine against the British administration, the Black and Tans deployed similar tactics as they had in Ireland, including “demolition of homes, or in some cases, entire villages of suspected rebels; arrests and imprisonments without warrants, charges or trials; beatings; and torture.”<sup>19</sup> At the time, comparisons emerged wherein Palestinians were equated to the Irish as peoples resisting the colonization of their land at the hand of the Black and Tans and the British and Zionist colonial powers.<sup>20</sup> In later times, comparisons were changed as American Zionists started portraying Palestinians Jews as the colonized seeking to rid themselves of the British Black and Tans, legitimizing Jewish Americans’ help in the creation of Jewish Free State in Palestine in the same way that Irish Americans had helped to create the Irish Free State.<sup>21</sup> In Ireland, I found that the initial comparison between the suffering of the Irish and Palestinian people under the Black and Tans, as the paragon of colonial brutality, lived on.

While these concern historical events that shape Irish collective consciousness, people also established comparability between their own experiences with checkpoints, watch towers, and police searches and those same things happening in Palestine. These were part of people’s daily realities of living in the North of Ireland or of travelling from the South to the North for work, family visits, or other reasons. The immediacy and intensity of these comparative associations became clear from the way Irish activists spoke about the occupation of Palestine, whether in the context of seeing news footage or seeing it with their own eyes. As activist Peter from West-Belfast shared about his visit to Hebron (*Al-Khalil*) in the West Bank:

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<sup>16</sup> Fearghal McGarry, *The Rising: Ireland: Easter 1916* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016).

<sup>17</sup> Digital interview with Cully Rads from Cork, Ireland by author, 9 April 2021.

<sup>18</sup> Richard Bennett, *The Black and Tans* (Barnsley: Pen and Sword, 2010); David M. Leeson, *The Black and Tans: British Police and Auxiliaries in the Irish War of Independence, 1920-1921* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).

<sup>19</sup> Richard Andrew Cahill, “‘Going Berserk’: Black and Tans” in Palestine, *Jerusalem Quarterly* 38 (2009): 66.

<sup>20</sup> Richard Andrew Cahill, “The Image of Black and Tans” in late Mandate Palestine, *Jerusalem Quarterly* 40 (2009): 50.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*

When we came down the little Souq street and we wanted to go to Al-Shuhada Street, the Israeli soldiers stopped us ... I kept referring to them as British, as British soldiers, because when I looked at them, my own memories of my childhood just came flooding back.<sup>22</sup>

In Peter's experience in that exact moment, there was no longer any distinction between the British soldiers he had encountered growing up on the Falls Road in West Belfast, and the Israeli Defense Force (IDF) soldiers that stopped him in the street in Palestine. These personal experiences, and their emotional and non-intentional associations, are discussed in more detail in section three.

In talking about events that people had experienced personally, comparisons were drawn between perceptions of the mindset of the occupiers in both Ireland and Palestine. There were differences in nuance between the comparisons made, but they all established comparability between those engaging in settler-colonialism in different times and places. As Catherine from Derry captured:

You can see the connection between these settlers, occupiers. Their psyche is the same. ... The siege mentality. The feeling of having to really reinforce who they are and their identity and wanting to dominate, wanting to be superior, wanting to be on top.<sup>23</sup>

Others compared the feeling this mindset gave them, such as activist Máire from Galway:

I was in Belfast once a few days before the [annual loyalist] parade and they were doing this pre-parade, and I was genuinely intimidated.<sup>24</sup> I was genuinely scared. I was like wow; they're actually marching to hate my people. That level of animosity. ... I could kind of see that same feeling in Palestinian people.<sup>25</sup>

In speaking to me, activist and professor James from Cork compared the political attitudes derived from this mindset:

I think the only peoples who have difficulty in grasping the injustice of Palestine are people whose whole culture is steeped in settler-colonialism. And there is a lot of countries, mostly in the Anglophone world, but not only in the Anglophone world, where that is true. ... I think that any society whose self-respect is partly tied up with having to justify to themselves that they are living in a house or living on land which was expropriated from another people is not going to immediately grasp the injustice of what Zionism did to the Palestinians. But we don't have to feel that guilt here [in Ireland].<sup>26</sup>

James powerfully reverses the question of Irish support for Palestine to the question of the lack of support in other places, linking it to what he deems settler guilt. Because the Irish do not have the settler guilt that people in settler colonial states have, they are able to see more clearly the injustice inflicted on Palestinians. The comparison here is not between the experiences of occupied peoples per se, as Catherine and Máire emphasized, but rather, between the views of peoples who have not engaged in settler-colonialism themselves.

In conversations, comparability was also established between ways of resisting colonial practices and mentalities in Ireland and Palestine. In more concrete and practical terms, activists mentioned boycott tactics as an important link between Ireland and Palestine. Charles Boycott

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<sup>22</sup> Digital interview with Peter Kelly from Belfast, Ireland by author, 17 February 2021.

<sup>23</sup> Digital interview with Catherine Hutton from Derry, Ireland by author, 17 March 2021.

<sup>24</sup> Referring to the Twelfth of July celebration whereby Orange Order and loyalist marching bands hold parades to celebrate their culture and identity. The parade is part of the longer summer marching season, which also sees large bonfires being lit the night before the parades, on what is called Eleventh Night.

<sup>25</sup> Digital interview with Máire [pseudonym] from Galway, Ireland by author, 23 February 2021.

<sup>26</sup> Digital interview with James Bowen from Cork, Ireland by author, 9 March 2021.

was an English land agent who came to Ireland and was ostracized by the local Irish community in response to his planned eviction of 11 tenant farmers. This led to the verb “to boycott.” Three people I interviewed drew the link between this Irish history of boycotts and the emergence of the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) movement for Palestine in 2005. Coincidentally or not, it was the Irish Congress of Trade Unions (ICTU) that became the first European trade union federation to join the boycott of Israel in 2007.<sup>27</sup> As early as 1982, the organization Ireland Friends of Palestine had already advocated the boycott of Israeli goods.<sup>28</sup>

In speaking of ways of resisting imperial architectures in Ireland and Palestine, I was told stories about the historical connection between republican groups such as the IRA on the one hand, and the Palestinian movements such as the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) and the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP) on the other. This connection was most active in the 1970s and 1980s when there were joint trainings and offers for arms procurement.<sup>29</sup> While this connection is magnified in global anti-terrorism discourses, the mutual support in reality dried up in the 1980s when the PLO forged links with the government of Ireland.<sup>30</sup> The political support remained present and gained prominence in popular imaginaries, manifested regularly up until the present day through solidarity murals on both the Apartheid Wall in Bethlehem and the International Wall in Belfast.<sup>31</sup> The narratives of mutual support are sometimes romanticized, but Deputy to the Dáil (TD) Thomas Gould and other republican politicians I spoke to confirmed that there are conversations and exchanges with revolutionary political groups in Ireland up until the present day.<sup>32</sup> The flying of Palestinian flags in republican areas in Ireland is also a vibrant legacy from the early days of mutual support between both anti-imperial movements, going back as far as the 1980s.<sup>33</sup>

In the present-day, comparative imaginaries of resistance tactics are still mobilized in narratives about Irish and Palestinian hunger strikers. As we saw at the beginning of this chapter, the Irish republican Bobby Sands, who initiated the 1981 hunger strike, is a known revolutionary figure in Palestine. The hunger strike took place during the Troubles, a 30-yearlong conflict about the status of the North of Ireland and the discrimination of the Catholic population.<sup>34</sup> The 1981 hunger strike was the culmination of the republican prisoner protest to demand political status and gained worldwide media coverage when Sands was elected to the British Parliament before he died.<sup>35</sup> Hunger strikes have been a prime mode of protest in Ireland since the pre-Christian era, and have been very significant throughout Irish history, for instance in 1923 when 8000 Irish prisoners went on hunger strike to oppose the Anglo-Irish Treaty.<sup>36</sup>

Hunger strikes have also become a main mode of protest for Palestinians in Israeli prisons, and while I have found no concrete evidence for this, several people I met in Ireland

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<sup>27</sup> Marie-Violaine Louvet, *Civil Society, Post-Colonialism and Transnational Solidarity* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan Limited, 2016), 2.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 40.

<sup>29</sup> Bill Rolston, “‘The Brothers on the Walls’: International Solidarity and Irish Political Murals,” *Journal of Black Studies* 39, no. 3 (2009): 453.

<sup>30</sup> Tim Pat Coogan, *The IRA* (London: HarperCollins, 2000), 489.

<sup>31</sup> Rolston, “The Brothers on the Walls,” 446-470.

<sup>32</sup> Interview with Sinn Féin City Councilor Mick Nugent from Cork, Ireland by author, 24 June 2021; Interview with Sinn Féin Deputy to the Dáil (TD) Thomas Gould from Cork, Ireland by author, 1 July 2021.

<sup>33</sup> Andrew Hill, and Andrew White, “The Flying of Israeli Flags in Northern Ireland,” *Identities: Global Studies in Culture and Power* 15, no. 1 (2008): 33.

<sup>34</sup> Tim Pat Coogan, *The Troubles: Ireland's ordeal 1966-1996 and the search for peace* (London: Random House, 1996).

<sup>35</sup> Aogan Mulcahy, “Claims-making and the construction of legitimacy: Press coverage of the 1981 Northern Irish hunger strike,” *Social Problems* 42, no. 4 (1995): 449-467.

<sup>36</sup> George Sweeney, “Irish Hunger Strikes and the Cult of Self-Sacrifice,” *Journal of Contemporary History* 28, no. 3 (1993): 421-437.

told me that there have been exchanges of experiences and hunger strike tactics between Irish and Palestinian prisoners. A well-known mural in Belfast from the early 2000s shows a Palestinian and an Irish political prisoner locking hands between their cells, accompanied by the text “تضامن Solidarity P.O.W.s (prisoners of war).”<sup>37</sup> Palestinian hunger strikes are widely publicized by Irish activist groups, which implicitly mobilizes these comparative connections. In the section that follows, I continue to discuss these connections between Ireland and Palestine and show how they resonate in Ireland by connecting experiences across time.

## 2. Speed Traps and Time Warps: Historical and Present-Day Comparisons

After discussing how comparability is established between Ireland and Palestine, this section focuses on how these experiences resonate with one another across different time periods. In many of the comparative statements I heard in Ireland, time played a central role. The previous sections discussed how people established comparability between their own experiences with checkpoints, watch towers, and police searches and those same things happening in Palestine. Yet, there was often a sense of temporal difference between the occupations of Ireland and Palestine. As I show in this section, people identify differences in the speed and duration of occupation, but also illuminated differences in the historical period in which it takes place.

As the settler-colonization, surveillance, and division of Palestine started relatively late compared to that of Ireland, these forms of violence are accumulating and accelerating through new and improved infrastructures and technologies. This is why some people I spoke to doubted whether the situations could still be meaningfully compared. Ciara, an activist from an interface community in North Belfast told me: “It’s not comparable. Yes, there was trouble here. There was (sic) bombs here. People got shot here. People got lifted here. Turned and arrested. But it’s happening a hundred times worse, a thousand times worse in Palestine.”<sup>38</sup> For others, including Catherine from Derry, the differences were most clearly betrayed by the materiality of the Israeli occupation: “We did a walk around the walls, and I thought: My god. I’ve seen walls, I’ve seen barbed wire fences, I’ve seen barriers and gates, but I have never seen anything like this.”<sup>39</sup> John Collins has theorized the “acceleration” of settler colonial violence in Palestine.<sup>40</sup> Compared to Ireland, what we see is the increasing speed by which land is expropriated and control is asserted through a constellation of governments, organizations, and corporations. While one conclusion is that the situation in Palestine is no longer comparable to that in Ireland, another is that Palestine is the continuation of a devastating process that was started in Ireland centuries before Balfour, but that in Palestine is increasingly in overdrive.

In addition to speed, time was also central to comparisons with Palestine through a focus on the duration of occupation. As Fra, an activist from Belfast told me: “The only difference [between Ireland and Palestine] is the timescale. We’ve been occupied for 800 years; Palestine has been occupied for 80 years.”<sup>41</sup> The timeframe of 800 years, which marks the first Anglo-Norman invasion of Ireland in 1169, was brought up time and time again by Irish activists from all walks of life.<sup>42</sup> This central event in Irish collective consciousness was then contrasted to the relatively

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<sup>37</sup> *Lonely Planet*, “Solidarity Wall,” accessed 7 September 2021, <https://www.lonelyplanet.com/ireland/northern-ireland/belfast/attractions/solidarity-wall/a/poi-sig/1079289/1316897>.

<sup>38</sup> Digital interview with Ciara Ni Heachain from Belfast, Ireland by author, 18 February 2021.

<sup>39</sup> Digital interview with Catherine Hutton from Derry, Ireland by author, 17 March 2021.

<sup>40</sup> Collins, *Global Palestine*, 83.

<sup>41</sup> Digital interview with Fra Hughes from Belfast, Ireland by author, 18 February 2021.

<sup>42</sup> J. F. O’Doherty, “The Anglo-Norman Invasion, 1167-71,” *Irish Historical Studies* 1, no. 2 (1938): 154-157.

short Palestinian experience under occupation. This timeframe, coupled with notions of Irish endurance and perseverance, led to the idea that Palestinians would be able to learn from the Irish, much longer experience with colonial violence. As Robert from Dublin recounted:

They have been fighting this battle more or less since 1948. We've had 800 years here; from English/British domination to eventually the uprisings here and then to get our independent state. It takes a long time. Going back to when I arrived [in Palestine] and saw what the situation in the West Bank was. How fragmented it was. A lot of the people we met seemed to be losing hope and that was the message we were trying to get across to them: Look, you have a long, long way to go.<sup>43</sup>

Most prominent, beyond speed and duration, was the notion that present-day Palestine is comparable to Ireland in a not-so-distant past. This came up especially when I asked activists from Ireland about their experiences visiting Palestine. "It was almost like going back in history and going back in time," activist Ryan from Derry said, as he remembered episodes from his own childhood through telling me about his visits to Palestine.<sup>44</sup> He contacted me later to share more recollections that arose only after the interview. "Going to Palestine is like going to Derry in 1981," he concluded.<sup>45</sup> In asking activists about their visits to Palestine, nearly all of my interviewees mentioned similar experiences of recognizing a past that was lost: "It was basically like me going back into a time warp," Peter from West Belfast said.<sup>46</sup> "It brought me right back to my youth."<sup>47</sup> Oftentimes, this led to a sharp contrast between the historicity of the struggle in Ireland and the contemporaneity of that in Palestine: "Our struggle was historic, and their struggle is present," proclaimed Fra from Belfast. He continued: "Within the next 10 years, Ireland will be reunified and our historical war with an imperialist occupation will end. But in 10 years' time, you're going to have an expanded Israel."<sup>48</sup>

The contrast between historicity and contemporaneity was softened when I considered the different ways in which activists in Ireland could identify with Palestinian experiences. As Catherine from Derry shared:

I think that any Irish person that has a sense of Irishness can completely identify with that feeling of always having been under the cosh of a colonizer. And I don't mean that in a dramatic sense of being beaten to the ground or whatever, but we have a historic memory. It's in each in every one of us from when we were young, growing up. And it's still hard for people in the North to really enjoy the full fruits of their identity because there's a reluctance and a resistance to allow things like the language and the culture to have its place in society.<sup>49</sup> While the Irish language landscape is slightly different in the North than in the South of Ireland, the Irish language continues to be a central part of the overall struggle for Irish identity and a united Ireland. As Máire from Galway proclaimed:

Look, I speak Irish because I've been determined to speak Irish and I continue to speak it – but I've lost my language. I've lost a lot of my culture. I've lost all those things to the British. So, I suppose in that sense I can see what is happening to the Palestinians and I can identify.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> Digital interview with Robert Boyd from Dublin, Ireland by author, 25 February 2021.

<sup>44</sup> Digital interview with Ryan Moore from Derry, Ireland by author, 17 February 2021.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

<sup>46</sup> Digital interview with Peter Kelly from Belfast, Ireland by author, 17 February 2021.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

<sup>48</sup> Digital interview with Fra Hughes from Belfast, Ireland by author, 18 February 2021.

<sup>49</sup> Digital interview with Catherine Hutton from Derry, Ireland by author, 17 March 2021.

<sup>50</sup> Digital interview with Máire [pseudonym] from Galway, Ireland by author, 23 February 2021.

It is not difficult to see this close connection between coloniality on the one hand and cultural and linguistic dispossession on the other.

The present-day Irish speaking areas of the South of Ireland, called the “Gaeltacht”, are mostly in the West of the island, as the British invasion spread from the more prosperous East.<sup>51</sup> During the Troubles, when the Irish language was mobilized as part of the resistance movement, Gaeltacht areas became established in enclaves in West Belfast and in prisons by political prisoners.<sup>52</sup> During my visit to Ireland, Conor from Belfast told me about his experience going to the first and only Irish language school in the North at the time. As “one of the faces of the struggle”, he remembered how his school received visitors from all over the world who came in support, including Angela Davis and activists from Palestine.<sup>53</sup> In the past few decades, Irish language schools have become established across the North of Ireland, and while the struggle for recognition is carried on, the language is increasingly spoken by younger generations.<sup>54</sup>

Beyond the effects of cultural and linguistic colonization, I sensed that there are other ways in which Palestinian oppression resonates with Irish experiences in the present. These seemed more emotional, visceral, and often involuntary, and therefore more difficult to articulate directly in interviews. What Catherine from Derry described as the continued presence of the “historic memory” in “each and every one of us” seemed to me to be more than just a memory, as it intruded frequently into the present. As Conor from Belfast told me: “I know that me and my friends all carry the trauma of what we directly went through and what our parents went through and what their parents went through. That’s not historical. When does something become history?”<sup>55</sup> The next section deepens the understanding of the resonances between Ireland and Palestine in the present by articulating these more subliminal emotional associations.

### 3. Connecting the Dots: The Trauma of the Troubles

After discussing comparisons between Ireland as a historical struggle and Palestine as an ongoing one, this section zooms in on the contemporary resonance of the Palestinian struggle. In other words, I focus on how the comparison with Palestine is lived and felt in the Irish present. In interviews and conversations that I had in Ireland, I was not always able to get a sense of the emotional and visceral dimensions of relating to Palestine. Understandably, not everybody let me into their emotional world. In some cases, body language or intonation betrayed what people’s words did not. In other cases, for instance when people did invite me into their physical world, there were material signs that told the story. While I only included fragments of conversations in this section that people explicitly consented to, the analysis is grounded in this wider socio-material understanding of life in the aftermath of conflict and under continued occupation.

Palestinian experiences under occupation can not only be grasped by reference to Irish history, but also resonate deeply with the emotional afterlives of this history in the present. Before Catherine from Derry expressed to me her ideas on the historic memory of Irish people,

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<sup>51</sup> Michael Bradley, “Is it possible to revitalize a dying language? An examination of attempts to halt the decline of Irish,” *Open Journal of Modern Linguistics* 4, no. 4 (2014): 538.

<sup>52</sup> Dieter Reinisch, “Political Prisoners and the Irish Language: A North-South Comparison,” *Studi Irlandesi: A Journal of Irish Studies* 6 (2016): 239-258.

<sup>53</sup> Interview with Conor [pseudonym] from Belfast, Ireland by author, 14 June 2021..

<sup>54</sup> *United Kingdom Department of Education*, “Irish medium-schools,” accessed 21 July 2021, <https://www.education-ni.gov.uk/articles/irish-medium-schools>.

<sup>55</sup> Interview with Conor [pseudonym] from Belfast, Ireland by author, 14 June 2021.

as discussed in the previous section, she had already conveyed this point implicitly by sharing some of her own memories. One gripping story was the one about her first visit to Palestine:

We went to an area in East Jerusalem. Gradually it was being taken over by Jewish groups and families that were moving in, and Palestinian people were put out of their houses. We visited this one family that had been living for decades and decades in a house that was divided in two parts. At the back of the house there was (sic) like 9 or 10 of them living in it and the front of the house had been taken over by two Jewish men from Brooklyn who just moved in one day when the family was out. Squatted. They had attack dogs with them. It was awful because there was (sic) young children in the Palestinian family and these men were naked in front of the windows and exposing themselves as a way of intimidating. It was just horrifying. They literally didn't go out as a family anymore because they couldn't leave the house unattended. ... I was very emotional to be perfectly honest with you. Very emotional and very angry. I cried and I felt very helpless. I was born in 1969 but I would always remember my mother telling me that in them (sic) days Catholics in the North of Ireland were discriminated against in housing. A lot of Catholic families were denied proper housing and the preference was given to Protestants. ... I remember my mummy telling me that her father said to her: 'there's a family coming to stay because they've been put out of their house.' And the house that she lived in – and that I was born in - was literally two up, two down, you know? You can imagine the size of it. And this family moved into one of the downstairs rooms. They were only meant to be there for two weeks, but they ended up in there for two years.<sup>56</sup>

For Catherine, the large-scale expulsion of Palestinians from their East Jerusalem homes was not just a distant injustice, but a familiar catastrophe that struck her to the core. After all, housing discrimination was one of the major issues for the late 1960s Irish civil rights movement, which marked the beginning of the Troubles.<sup>57</sup> Discrimination against Catholics in housing was most rampant in overcrowded Derry, Catherine's hometown, where Catholic families often had to resort to living in one room altogether, with some houses intended for one family being occupied by six or seven families.<sup>58</sup> For Catherine, seeing this Palestinian family cramped together in the house that was no longer fully and safely theirs conjured up associations of her ancestral home. Her experience of visiting East Jerusalem and seeing discrimination and dispossession similar to what her own family had lived through moved her to the extent that that upon her return, she founded the Derry branch of the IPSC.

The ways in which seeing or hearing about Palestine conjures up feelings about prior experiences is not always directly obvious. Activists I talked to in Ireland would occasionally initially give me their views and opinions on Palestine in a moral register, detached from their own specific circumstances and trajectories of life. In one case, I also encountered resistance to the idea of comparability between Ireland and Palestine on a moral basis: “[comparisons] don't matter to me at all”, James said.<sup>59</sup> “People often loosely say that [Irish people are involved in what is happening in Palestine because of Irish history], and sometimes people will make certain analogies in order to open other people's eyes. I would hope that regardless of whatever happened in Irish history, that anybody with a sense of justice would actually behave the same

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<sup>56</sup> Digital interview with Catherine Hutton from Derry, Ireland by author, 17 March 2021.

<sup>57</sup> Lorenzo Bosi, "The dynamics of social movement development: Northern Ireland's civil rights movement in the 1960s," *Mobilization: An International Quarterly* 11, no. 1 (2006): 81-100.

<sup>58</sup> Niall Ó Dochartaigh, "The Politics of Housing; Social Change and Collective Action in Derry in the 1960s," in *Derry and Londonderry: History and Society*, ed. Gerard O'Brien (Dublin: Geography Publications, 1999).

<sup>59</sup> Digital interview with James Bowen from Cork, Ireland by author, 9 March 2021.

way.”<sup>60</sup> Striving for justice for Palestine to James has become a moral duty that is not specifically connected to his Irishness, a call beyond time and place.

Throughout the course of the interviews, I tried to get behind these moral dispositions to get a sense of the more emotional, visceral, and involuntary connections to Palestine. I was very careful not to overdetermine these connections and I was generally wary of overinterpreting and reading into what these activists told me. What I noticed, however, was that opinions people held about Palestine, especially the ones they seemed to strongly believe in and invest in through activist work, lined up quite clearly with personal experiences of similar circumstances in Ireland. These opinions and personal experiences could be presented as separate issues, even in entirely different moments in an interview. As Conor from Belfast told me:

If you’re looking at kids [in Palestine] throwing rocks at soldiers, some people would think that they should just be in the house, that they shouldn’t be throwing rocks, that they’re just going to get themselves into trouble. But then coming from my perspective, I’ve got more of an understanding of why they might be doing that, why they’re not in the house, and the motivations behind it.<sup>61</sup>

At this early point in the interview, he explained that he was able to understand the children’s rock-throwing “on a vibrational level.”<sup>62</sup> After talking for a longer time and having established more trust, he shared with me the following memory:

As teenagers, me and my brother - who is two years younger than me - would have experienced soldiers on the street and we would have thrown things at them or had run-ins with them at different times. ... We would start hitting soldiers in the balls or we would try to block their way if they were on foot patrol. The soldiers were scared of us, and we would have done whatever we could to try and exaggerate that as much as possible. ... We would have seen it as part of a way to make them know that they weren’t welcome in our communities because they weren’t.<sup>63</sup>

In telling me this story, he leapt back and forth between the exhilaration and urgency of challenging the British soldiers as he had experienced it as a teenager, and possible judgments of such acts in the present. In a moment of reflection, he told me: “if I had a kid now and they were thirteen and they would be doing what we were doing back then, I think I’d probably be horrified.”<sup>64</sup> Immediately afterwards, he retracted this statement, explaining that this judgment could not apply to his lived political reality at the time. I understood, however, that this was a moment of subliminal catastrophic translation. In discussing how Conor related to rock-throwing children in Palestine, it was the teenage boy from West Belfast that shined through.

I found that there was a direct though implicit connection between particular traumatic experiences and the type of work activists ended up doing for Palestinian liberation. These experiences seemed to animate news coming from faraway Palestine. Brought it to life. These connections were not clear-cut, bearing the imprint of time and sometimes showing signs of the fragmentation that is so central to trauma. Yet, in several cases interviewees would connect the dots over the course of the interview. “One of my earliest memories is seeing soldiers on the street,” Ciara, a very energetic organizer and activist from North Belfast told me.<sup>65</sup> “Sometimes

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<sup>60</sup> Ibid.

<sup>61</sup> Interview with Conor [pseudonym] from Belfast, Ireland by author, 14 June 2021.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid.

<sup>65</sup> Digital interview with Ciara Ni Heachain from Belfast, Ireland by author, 18 February 2021.



when you opened your back door and you entered through the back gate, they were looking at you with a gun. As a child, that scarred me.”<sup>66</sup> It was a DVD on Gaza that Ciara said impelled her to start her activist work for Palestine. When I asked her how the video had made her feel, how it moved her into action, she told me the following story:

There was a very close friend of mine, her father was shot dead. He was a black taxi driver with my father. They were both black taxi drivers together. Her and I, we were very close, and we would have had sleepovers in each other’s houses and stuff. Her father, Harry, was such a beautiful man and he was shot dead. And [starts crying] that was really awful. Awful. You know? Tracy lost her mother really young as well. How could they do this to that man? He was never involved in anything. He was just a taxi driver trying to live a normal life and take care of his two daughters. They were without a mother and without a father. ... For me, now that I think about it, it definitely does affect you. Definitely when I think about [Tracy], the way [her dad] was murdered, and in front of his children. In front of Tracy.<sup>67</sup>

Growing up in one of the most violent interface areas of Belfast, Ciara related to the Gaza War from the perspective of the child she had been during the Troubles. She told me assuredly: “In 2014 I saw what they had done in Gaza, and I just thought: no, this cannot go on ... I just remembered back to when I was a child and what I had seen and I thought: no child should have to live like this, in this day and age especially.”<sup>68</sup> She was determined to play her part in ending the threatening situation for Palestinian children; starting out with handing out leaflets outside a local shopping center with friends and eventually endeavoring to set up BDS Belfast.<sup>69</sup> It was a powerful way of resonating with others, mobilizing present-day feelings that took her back to a past self: “I wouldn’t wish it on any child growing up to see the things that I have seen.”<sup>70</sup> “Even if it was an Israeli kid in that situation”, she emphasized.<sup>71</sup>

This is not to say that traumatic experiences necessarily or even in most cases incite direct political responsiveness, but rather to say that comparisons with Palestine are lived and deeply felt in the present and that in some cases, these felt comparisons have a mobilizing effect. I mostly talked to activists and politicians who in some way or another, had been propelled into action, but even in their stories, I found traces of different experiences, too. Ryan from Derry was one of those very active people; a young guy always on the look-out for creative modes of protest. In 2015, he noticed that media outlets would only report on Palestine if something extremely deadly was happening and he came up with a plan to create media coverage of Palestine by bringing a delegation of Irish runners over for the Bethlehem Marathon. This hit many of Ireland’s papers.<sup>72</sup>

In 2016, upon finding out that Celtic FC, the Scottish football club founded by Irish immigrants and popular all over Ireland, drew an Israeli team for the Champions League, Ryan immediately had 2,000 protest t-shirts made. Along with the activist work of other Celtic supporters, this eventually grew into the major protest action ‘Match the Fine for Palestine.’<sup>73</sup>

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<sup>66</sup> Ibid.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid.

<sup>69</sup> BDS branches are always founded in close consultation with the BDS National Committee in Palestine.

<sup>70</sup> Digital interview with Ciara Ni Heachain from Belfast, Ireland by author, 18 February 2021.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid.

<sup>72</sup> E.g., *Irish News*, “Running for Palestine,” 18 March 2015, <https://www.irishnews.com/lifestyle/2015/03/18/news/running-for-palestine-118497/>.

<sup>73</sup> After the match, Celtic FC received a fine because its supporters flew hundreds of Palestinian flags in the stadium, considered an “illicit banner” by UEFA. In response, Celtic supporters launched an online campaign to raise funds for Palestinian charities, with the aim of matching the fine imposed by UEFA, raising £176K in total.

During the interview, we spoke about his activism and how it was fueled by going out to Palestine. Ryan was born in the 1980s and did not have much of a conscious experience of the Troubles, but nevertheless, the visit hit home: “In Palestine, I could see what my father, what my brothers and what my uncles had been through”, he told me.<sup>74</sup> While the visits to Palestine only strengthened Ryan in his activism, this was different for his father, who accompanied him on the first trip:

Seeing what was happening [in Palestine] only enhanced my desire and determination to do something, whereas for [my dad] I think it has the opposite effect. It spooked him because it reminded him, maybe, of what he had been through and what his brothers had been through. Being imprisoned, being shot, all the harassment, discrimination, and racist attitudes. It really was very moving for the two of us, but in very different ways, from very different ends of the spectrum. For me, it made me more determined. For him, it made him almost go into hibernation for a while.<sup>75</sup>

Ryan told me that his father had lived through Bloody Sunday and that he had testified at the Widgery Tribunal held in the aftermath.<sup>76</sup> His brother, Ryan’s uncle, was shot and blinded on a different occasion. To relive the reality of searches and shootings in Palestine “was very tough for him”, Ryan said. “Whenever we got back from Palestine it took him quite a long time to readjust and readapt because he hadn’t seen things like that in so, so long.”<sup>77</sup> In the case of Ryan’s father, the felt comparison with Palestine did not have a mobilizing effect, but rather the opposite.

The stories and memories in this section have laid bare how activists in Ireland are able to resonate with Palestine through experience of troubles that we might call traumatic. The realities and effects of trauma in Ireland, and especially the North of Ireland, are fairly well documented.<sup>78</sup> Prior studies have spoken of a sense of “traumatic entrapment”, whereby the North of Ireland remains stuck in the “haunting past” of the Troubles.<sup>79</sup> This is consistent with the understanding of post-traumatic stress as a “disease of time”, whereby the past is relived in the present through flashbacks, intrusions, and replaying old behaviors.<sup>80</sup> In the recollections discussed above, we see that witnessing violence taking place in Palestine was experienced as an involuntary replaying of scenes from the Irish past, be it housing discrimination and displacement, military presence, or assassinations. In most cases, people were overwhelmed with emotions that took them back to specific episodes in their own lives. The way in which these comparisons with Palestine are lived and felt as events of the Irish past that intrude into the present disturbs the easy distinction between the struggle in Ireland as historical and that in Palestine as contemporaneous, as

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<sup>74</sup> Digital interview with activist Ryan Moore from Derry, Ireland by author, 17 February 2021.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid.

<sup>76</sup> Sunday the 30<sup>th</sup> of January 1972, when British soldiers shot 26 unarmed protestors in the Bogside area of Derry in what can only be described as a massacre.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid.

<sup>78</sup> E.g., Brendan P. Bunting, Finola R. Ferry, Samuel D. Murphy, Siobhan M. O’Neill, and David Bolton, “Trauma Associated with Civil Conflict and Posttraumatic Stress Disorder: Evidence from the Northern Ireland Study of Health and Stress,” *Journal of Traumatic Stress* 26, no. 1 (2013): 134-141; Finola Ferry, Brendan Bunting, Samuel Murphy, Siobhan O’Neill, Dan Stein, and Karestan Koenen, “Traumatic Events and their Relative PTSD Burden in Northern Ireland: A Consideration of the Impact of the ‘Troubles,’” *Social Psychiatry and Psychiatric Epidemiology* 49, no. 3 (2014): 435-446; Philip Hyland, Frédérique Vallières, Marylène Cloitre, Menachem Ben-Ezra, Thanos Karatzias, Miranda Olff, Jamie Murphy, and Mark Shevlin, “Trauma, PTSD, and Complex PTSD in the Republic of Ireland: Prevalence, Service Use, Comorbidity, and Risk Factors,” *Social Psychiatry and Psychiatric Epidemiology* 56, no. 4 (2021): 649-658.

<sup>79</sup> Stefanie Lehner, “The Irreversible and the Irrevocable: Encircling Trauma in Contemporary Northern Irish Literature,” in *Memory Ireland Volume 3: The Famine and the Troubles*, ed. Oona Frawley (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2014): 272-92.

<sup>80</sup> Allan Young, *The Harmony of Illusions* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), 7.

introduced in the previous section. “I’m a traumatized person dealing with traumatized people,” Amir, an activist and refugee from Jenin, Palestine told me about living in Ireland.<sup>81</sup>

At the same time, I refuse to limit the way comparisons with Palestine are lived and felt in the present to involuntary post-traumatic responses, as this explanation renders too passive what are in fact, active, collective forms of political responsiveness. What we see are ways in which injustices perpetrated in Ireland are challenged, contested, and then mobilized to respond to suffering in Palestine. As Conor from Belfast said: “My philosophy about continuing on the struggle that people paid dearly for in whatever shape of form, is that it isn’t just about doing it geographically specific for the North of Ireland, it expands to places that you relate to as well, such as Palestine.”<sup>82</sup> In grappling with this, I follow Graham Dawson’s interpretation of emotional experience in the wake of the Troubles not only as “a wound crying out,” but as a complex interaction between internal and external worlds.<sup>83</sup> In Dawson’s words: “Even if temporally located ‘in the past’, then, emotions are durational and involve complex relations between past, present and future.”<sup>84</sup> Activism following political violence can be understood as more than a continued entrapment in post-traumatic responses to a violent past. Engagements in activism are also “attempts to change social reality, forge new connections and align inner reality with what is happening externally.”<sup>85</sup> In this sense, comparisons to Palestine also prove to be catastrophic in the relational and creative senses of the term. To better understand the intimate ways in which comparisons with Palestine intervene in the Irish political reality, the next section centers on present day tensions and divisions in Ireland.

#### **4. Be Divided and Be Conquered: Complicity, Alienation, and the North-South Divide**

After attuning to the more subliminal and emotional Irish resonances with Palestine in the present, this section attempts to understand how these visceral experiences connect to the current political reality in Ireland. The memories and feelings discussed in the previous section were all shared by activists from the North of Ireland, as they tended to have the strongest emotional responses to the occupation of Palestine. In this section, I introduce the continued tensions in Irish politics and the division between the North and the South. I specifically focus on how people have come to make sense of these divisions through their associations with Palestine.

In interviews, when I asked people from the South about how they resonated with Palestine, they would also bring up memories of experiencing checkpoints, watch towers, and police searches when they traveled to the North, but would add that this was nothing compared to what it must be like to live in Belfast. As described by Debbie Lisle, the term “Belfast” tends to be “saturated with received connotations: war-torn, divided, run-down, ready to implode into sectarian conflict at any moment.”<sup>86</sup> The stark comparison between people’s own experience in Southern Ireland and the imagined one in Belfast quickly deems the Belfast’s violent history

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<sup>81</sup> Interview with Amir Abualrob in Dublin, Ireland by author, 12 June 2021.

<sup>82</sup> Interview with Conor [pseudonym] from Belfast, Ireland by author, 14 June 2021.

<sup>83</sup> Graham Dawson, “The Meaning of ‘Moving On’: From Trauma to the History and Memory of Emotions in ‘Post-Conflict’ Northern Ireland,” *Irish University Review* 47, no. 1 (2017): 90.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*, 96.

<sup>85</sup> Brandon Hamber, *Transforming Societies After Political Violence: Truth, Reconciliation, and Mental Health* (Berlin: Springer Science & Business Media, 2009), 88.

<sup>86</sup> Debbie Lisle, “Local Symbols, Global Networks: Rereading the Murals of Belfast,” *Alternatives* 31, no. 1 (2006): 30.

exceptional.<sup>87</sup> Through this comparison, I realized that activists in the North and the South not only had different lived experiences that were mobilized in association with Palestine (at least to an extent), but that the partition and indeed division of Ireland was also reified by how they articulated and emphasized those differences.

While support for Palestine is widespread across the whole of Ireland, I found that this does not mean that the way in which events in Palestine resonate is necessarily similar across the island. It is important to underline that all the activists I spoke to across Ireland gave me an affirmative answer when I asked them whether they could identify with Palestinians under occupation. They overwhelmingly claimed, as discussed in the first section, that this had to do with having experienced similar injustice. Yet, the more attentive I became to the associations that activists evoked in speaking about Palestine and the language they used to describe these associations, the more differences between the realities in the North and in the South became obvious. A poignant example was given by activist Cully from Cork in the South. Cully had visited Palestine twice with a delegation of activists from different groups across Ireland. I asked Cully about his conversations with Palestinians they met on these trips, and specifically how Palestinians had responded when they found out that he was Irish. He recalled that many of the Palestinians he met had a good knowledge of Ireland, and that they had emphasized similarities between their struggles. However, “it was kind of silly stuff they said,” Cully laughed.<sup>88</sup> He elaborated:

They would say: Our struggles are similar. Freedom for Ireland. All this kind of stuff. It’s kind of old-school in a way. That’s not the kind of language that would be used in Ireland really. It would have been used years ago; you know? When I was younger, you had people who would have used language like that and there’s still an element of that in the older generation. ... Don’t get me wrong, there is an Irish unity campaign and it’s quite effective at the moment. But we wouldn’t go around saying that. No. You might get people up in Belfast who say that.<sup>89</sup>

At a later point in the interview, he added:

“The narrative is almost like it was still a case of ‘just defeat Britain out of Ireland.’ Don’t get me wrong, I know that [Palestinians] know about the peace process [in Ireland] ... but it was still a ‘free Ireland’ type thing ... It’s innocent almost. Innocent in that they were looking at it in a simplistic form. As in: Brits out! There’s (sic) other dynamics involved in it. It’s the same as in Palestine. Plenty of Palestinians were quite comfortable with the way they are, you know? They probably don’t want the boat rocked.”<sup>90</sup>

Cully is getting at the complex, entangled dystopia of the present in Ireland, but in Palestine too. He uncovers that advanced occupation forces, like other systems of power, no longer operate through a stark distinction between the oppressor and the oppressed – which Cully deems an “innocent” way of understanding things. By talking about how plenty of Palestinians are too comfortable to want to overhaul the occupation completely, he alludes to the process by which these systems of power come to make victims complicit in their own oppression and/or the oppression of others, by creating a whole infrastructure of dependency and manipulation.

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<sup>87</sup> Ibid.

<sup>88</sup> Digital interview with Cully Rads from Cork, Ireland by author, 9 April 2021.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid.

This language of complex complicity is well-suited to capture the present-day situation in the South of Ireland. Earlier in this chapter, I discussed the 1919-1921 Anglo-Irish Treaty, which led to the partition of Ireland. Under the treaty, Ulster, the Northernmost province of Ireland, was stripped from 9 counties to a remaining 6, creating a Protestant demographic majority in what was now to be called Northern Ireland. The signing of the treaty led to a split in the Republican Movement between pro-treaty and anti-treaty factions.<sup>91</sup> As the republican struggle against the occupation of the North continued, republican groups and politicians in the South began to distance themselves from what was increasingly deemed an ethnic or religious conflict between Northern Catholics and Protestants, rather than a national anti-colonial struggle. In the North, the Southern distance from and lack of intervention in the increasing militarization of Catholic neighborhoods was perceived if not as complicity, then at least as neglect. Fionnuala O'Connor, in what became the first study of Catholic communities in the North of Ireland, found that people "inherited a powerful sense of betrayal and rejection by the Southern state."<sup>92</sup>

Over time, the disjuncture between the Northern and Southern understandings of the Troubles widened and the perception of an ethnic or religious conflict has become widespread in the South of Ireland as well as internationally. As Feargal Cochrane writes about the South:

This is not a society which defines itself as the product of colonial aggression or feels threatened by the intentions of its neighbors. As a consequence, many find it difficult to empathize with the conflict in the North, or the analysis offered by the nationalist community in the six counties that the violence in the region is rooted in the malign interference of the British government. The incongruity between chronic instability in one part of the island and harmony in the other has created subliminal tension between the two.<sup>93</sup>

Most academic sources similarly resort to interpretations of internal, ethnic, or religious conflict in talking about the Troubles and they are overwhelmingly silent on the colonial relationship between Britain and the North of Ireland.<sup>94</sup> The Southern estrangement from the republican struggle in the North was experienced on a personal level by Conor from Belfast, who recalled:

I only realized the extent of that feeling [of estrangement] in the South of Ireland when I went to Limerick when I was 18. The first day I was at uni, I didn't know anybody in Limerick, and I was just getting to know the people who were in my class. One of the fellas came over to me and he told me that a girl in the class was a Protestant and that I must hate her. It knocked me for six because it kind of gave me an insight into what people's perception was of me and by extension, what people thought was happening in the North.<sup>95</sup>

I was surprised to hear about notions of religious conflict being voiced in Limerick, given that all the activists I spoke to in the South seemed keenly aware of the historical occupation and domination of Ireland as a whole. I expected encountering this narrative in London, but not in Dublin. When I asked Conor how even people in the South of Ireland could believe in this isolated and disconnected version of the Troubles, he replied:

[It's] *especially* people in the South [who believe that]. The Southern government had a vested interest in maintaining that narrative because otherwise how would they be able to carry on doing what they were doing? How would they try to develop the 26 counties Free State as this

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<sup>91</sup> Thomas G. Fraser, *Ireland in Conflict 1922-1998* (London: Routledge, 2005), 1-7.

<sup>92</sup> Fionnuala O'Connor, *In Search of a State: Catholics in Northern Ireland* (Newtownards: Blackstaff Press, 1993), 223-4.

<sup>93</sup> Feargal Cochrane, "Any Takers? The Isolation of Northern Ireland," *Political Studies* 42, no. 3 (1994): 392.

<sup>94</sup> David Miller, *Rethinking Northern Ireland: Culture, Ideology and Colonialism* (London: Routledge, 2014), 1-16.

<sup>95</sup> Interview with Conor [pseudonym] from Belfast, Ireland by author, 14 June 2021.

independent country when there is a group of Irish people just up the road that are being oppressed politically and economically? You can't just go about your daily business when that's happening. It suited them to say it's just Catholics and Protestants. That was the line that came from Westminster and that's the line they by and large decided to follow and part of that was, in my opinion, that they didn't want to ruffle too many feathers in Westminster.<sup>96</sup> Catherine from Derry agreed, as she said: "I think that the people in the 26 counties aren't as engaged anymore as they would have been, you know? They're quite happy just to keep things the way the way they are. The status quo."<sup>97</sup> In this sense, and as Cully remarked earlier on, the boundaries were blurred between the British as oppressor and the Irish as oppressed.

The different languages and lived experiences of people in the South and in the North of Ireland after partition influenced how they resonated with Palestinian experiences of occupation. Southerners were more inclined to refer to the Irish struggle as historical, whereas Northerners, as we have seen in section three, emphasized and indeed *felt* the present-day comparability with Palestine. Positioning the Irish struggle as a historical one through the comparison with Palestine strengthens the narrative of the turmoil in the North as a local, ethnic conflict. In both ways, distance is created between the current political reality in the South and the occupation of the North. A few Southerners did allude to a sense of guilt towards the North, and this also arose through comparisons with Palestine.

A striking example of this is something that happened when an Irish activist delegation visited Palestine. These delegations of Irish activists tend to be made up of Southerners as well as Northerners involved in different groups and initiatives for Palestine. As recounted before by Cully, these Irish delegations usually receive a warm welcome when they arrive in Palestine, as Palestinians emphasize the mutual but asymmetrical solidarity. Conor, who also took part in one of these delegations, recalled what he observed:

The lads from the South nearly had imposter syndrome when they were being the recipients of this solidarity from the Palestinian side because they were like: We've never seen any soldiers in the street in Ireland, we haven't experienced anything like this.<sup>98</sup>

To Conor, who had had a Palestinian flag up in his West Belfast room since he was ten and experienced the solidarity with and from Palestinians as very important to his sense of republican identity and revolutionary consciousness, these sentiments from Southern activists in the delegation were not surprising. As he explained:

They would have been exposed to that narrative of Catholics versus Protestants. Even though it was just up the road, it might as well have been on the other side of the world. We felt that as well sometimes. Sometimes we felt like we were on the other side of the world because we were like: How come no one is coming to help us here?<sup>99</sup>

While solidarity with Palestine remains evident to Southerners, we see here traces of a Southern disconnect from both Palestinian and Northern experiences of occupation and conflict. Activists in the South established a contrast between their own experiences and what was happening "in Belfast." In the examples above, they also felt discomfort about the languages used by Palestinians to describe the political situation in Ireland and about "unjustly" receiving Palestinian expressions of solidarity. While this clearly made sense on a personal level – in that

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<sup>96</sup> Ibid.

<sup>97</sup> Digital interview with Catherine Hutton from Derry, Ireland by author, 17 March 2021.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid.

the “lads from the South” indeed had not experienced similar situations as they witnessed in Palestine and may not have used similar languages of struggle – this both reveals and reifies the partition and division of Ireland. For Southerners, the comparison with Palestine was more historical and further removed from their own daily reality, while for Northerners, the contemporaneousness of the comparison with Palestine underlines the continued state of the occupation of Ireland. This shows that comparisons with Palestine fulfil contrasting political functions within the Irish political landscape, along the lines of the continues North-South divide. While this section focused on how comparisons with Palestine provided a way of grappling with (and thereby reifying) these present-day tensions in Ireland, the next section discusses how Irish engagement in activism for Palestine is changing this social reality and forging new connections.

### **5. Hibernia Irredenta: Reviving Republicanism and Reconnecting Ireland**

After discussing how Northerners and Southerners in Ireland grapple with the reality of partition and separation through different comparisons with Palestine, this section discusses how new connections between groups across Ireland emerge through a common resonance with Palestine. In the previous section, we saw how for both Northerners and Southerners, the connection with Palestine was experienced through an alignment with the perceived external realities of complicity and alienation. These experiences, as we have seen, are divergent. As Conor underlines: “there’s an attitude that is quite widespread in the South of Ireland, that the armed struggle in the North was not a legitimate armed struggle, and that is connected with the Catholics versus Protestants narrative and the question why we would not just ‘live together peacefully.’”<sup>100</sup> This section discusses how notions of peaceful coexistence and ethnic or religious conflict, more commonly expressed in the South of Ireland, become challenged through reference to Palestine. It considers the role of activism for Palestine in revitalizing Irish connections between the North and in the South and between different republican groups.

While the previous section showed signs of Southern estrangement from the continued political struggle in North of Ireland, I realized over time that this estrangement transformed and even waned through seeing or gaining knowledge about the occupation of Palestine. In other words, it was through learning about Palestine that people’s interpretation of the Irish struggle also changed. After Conor shared his recollection of how the “lads from the South” had experienced receiving solidarity from Palestinians during their collective trip to Palestine, he told me what had happened next. Because the Southern delegates on the trip were uncomfortable in receiving Palestinian solidarity, the group decided to have a collective discussion about how they felt. Earlier on, they had started to come together at the end of the day to process their experiences and impressions. They found that this collective debrief helped them to process their emotions about what they saw happening in Palestine.

On this particular day, however, the discussion quickly shifted from Palestine back to Ireland. To Conor, the purpose of this discussion was to figure out “how to square that circle [between Southern and Northern experiences] in our heads.”<sup>101</sup> Figuring this out, according to Conor, entailed talking about Irish history and showing how this history still lived on in the North. Conor described how it was through visiting Palestine and seeing the daily reality of the

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<sup>100</sup> Interview with Conor [pseudonym] from Belfast, Ireland by author, 14 June 2021.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid.

occupation that activists from the South started to understand what was happening in the North of Ireland and “reconnect to it.”<sup>102</sup> Through a comparative understanding of the occupation of Palestine, the British occupation reemerged as something cutting across the North and the South of Ireland. In other words, the comparison with Palestine functioned as a catastrophic shock to Southerners and shifted how they could relate to the North.

While I found fewer clear signs of this, I expect that it is also through a comparative understanding with the occupation of Palestine that notions of “peaceful coexistence” and ethnic of religious conflict, commonly applied to the North of Ireland, can become challenged. These notions are similar to those used to describe the situation in Palestine, where discussions about the occupation often get displaced by narratives of religious conflict between Jews and Muslims and the necessity of coexistence between these groups.<sup>103</sup> Activists in the Palestinian movement contest such narratives and emphasize the centuries of coexistence of people of different faiths in the region prior to the Nakba and the violent establishment of the state of Israel.<sup>104</sup> They also tend to be critical of current coexistence project and initiatives, which are seen to be “normalizing” the occupation.<sup>105</sup> “Existence first, coexistence later” has become a common Palestinian slogan.<sup>106</sup>

In joining activist groups for Palestine, Irish people will become familiar with these interpretations, if they were not already. All of the activists I interviewed expressed views similar to the narratives of prominent Palestinian activist movements. As recognized by Conor: “You hear that same coexistence narrative [about Ireland] about Palestine. That’s all good to say from the outside. The Israelis don’t want the Palestinians to exist, never mind coexisting.”<sup>107</sup> As Robert from Dublin said to me: “We would never look at it as a Muslim – Jewish situation.”<sup>108</sup> Similarly, Máire from Galway remembered: “the Palestinians that we spoke to never really expressed: ‘we’re being oppressed because we’re Muslim.’ It was: ‘we’re being oppressed because we’re Palestinian.’”<sup>109</sup> Most Irish activists I encountered rejected the understanding of Israel-Palestine as a religious conflict that could be solved by peaceful coexistence. Rejecting this understanding of Palestine, is likely to shed doubt on the use of same narrative of internal, ethnic, or religious conflict in the context of Ireland. This could further bridge Northern and Southern experiences.

Comparisons with Palestine also establish new connections in the North of Ireland that potentially strengthen the struggle for a united Ireland. During my participant observation in activist initiatives, predominantly in Belfast, I saw that activism for Palestine brings together groups and factions that, in the context of national politics, would not align let alone cooperate. I encountered activists from all different ages and political proclivities. They would speak openly with me about the disagreements they had with one another on visions of the meaning of republicanism, the peace process in the North, and the prospect of Irish re-unification. They told

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<sup>102</sup> Ibid.

<sup>103</sup> E.g., Gidron, Katz, and Hasenfeld, eds., *Mobilizing for Peace*.

<sup>104</sup> As detailed in Marcelo Svirkys and Ronnen Ben-Arie, *From Shared Life to Co-Resistance in Historic Palestine* (London: Rowman and Littlefield, 2018).

<sup>105</sup> Normalization is defined as “the participation in any project, initiative or activity, in Palestine or internationally, that aims (implicitly or explicitly) to bring together Palestinians (and/or Arabs) and Israelis (people or institutions) without placing as its goal resistance to and exposure of the Israeli occupation and all forms of discrimination and oppression against the Palestinian people,” as formulated in Palestinian Campaign for the Academic & Cultural Boycott of Israel, “Israel’s Exceptionalism: Normalizing the Abnormal,” *Jadaliyya*. 31 October 2011, <https://www.jadaliyya.com/Details/24583>.

<sup>106</sup> *The Economist*, “Still campaigning for co-existence,” 30 August 2007, <https://www.economist.com/middle-east-and-africa/2007/08/30/still-campaigning-for-co-existence>.

<sup>107</sup> Interview with Conor [pseudonym] from Belfast, Ireland by author, 14 June 2021.

<sup>108</sup> Digital interview with Robert Boyd from Dublin, Ireland by author, 25 February 2021.

<sup>109</sup> Digital interview with Máire [pseudonym] from Galway, Ireland by author, 23 February 2021.



me about the various fallouts and tensions between different political groups. The fragmentation of militant republicanism in Ireland is well documented, but non-violent groups seemed to face similar splintering.<sup>110</sup> Activist Marty from Belfast told me that many groups in the North stake their claim to being the only remaining “real revolutionaries.”<sup>111</sup> However, through actions for Palestine, activists with different views on Irish politics were able to come together as they all did agree on being against foreign occupation, whether in Palestine or at home. While there were some tensions brewing between the different groups, predominantly between the IPSC and BDS, there was wide cooperation and important activities were organized jointly.

Comparisons with Palestine thus fulfil an important function in establishing republican connections in the current context of the peace process in the North of Ireland. The rapid splintering of republican groups in the North of Ireland can be explained through the waning of the revolutionary kind of republicanism in the wake of this peace process. With the end of the Troubles and the signing of the Good Friday Agreement on 10 April 1998, Sinn Fein, the political wing of the IRA, became “domesticated” - becoming part of the political system and safely contained within the boundaries of the state.<sup>112</sup> This also meant that electoral politics came at the expense of collective resistance against the continued occupation of the North. While Sinn Fein won its greatest electoral success in the South of Ireland in 2020, becoming the second-largest parliamentary party, different groups of republicans in the North contest the turn away from revolutionary republicanism. As activist Marty proclaimed:

Sinn Fein are in the master’s house now. They can wear the suits and they get the ministerial cars, and they are tolerated. But if they show one ounce of rebellion, they’re back out again. But it’s not just that. See, their sons and daughters; they were all given nice jobs in the legal system and in the police. They’re in the fabric of society; the middle-class fabric of society. So, if [the Sinn Fein politicians] lost their jobs and if it all came crashing down, then all their sons and daughters and grandsons and granddaughters would all lose their cozy wee lives, and they would have to go back into areas like ours.<sup>113</sup>

What Marty points out is that while the Good Friday Agreement put an end to the violence of the 1980s and 1990s, it also created, as we similarly saw in the South, a whole infrastructure of complicity in the North. While Sinn Fein had always been on the forefront of revolutionary republicanism, they were now distinguishable “from ‘normal’ political parties only by its empty rhetorical commitment to an alternative nation yet to be created.”<sup>114</sup> For republicans in the North, this created a need to form alternative modes of republicanism, different from Sinn Fein’s domesticated version. Over time, and arguably similar to what has happened in Palestine after the domestication of the PLO through the Oslo Agreements, this created confusion and division between different resistance groups.<sup>115</sup> The common outrage over the occupation of Palestine, however, creates possibilities for communication and cooperation between these groups.

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<sup>110</sup> John F. Morrison, *The Origins and Rise of Dissident Irish Republicanism: The Role and Impact of Organizational Splits* (London: Bloomsbury, 2013).

<sup>111</sup> Interview with Marty Rafferty from Belfast, Ireland by author, 23 June 2021.

<sup>112</sup> Niall Ó. Dochartaigh, "Republicanism Domesticated? All-Ireland Politics in an Age of Austerity," *The Political Quarterly* 83, no. 2 (2012): 256-264.

<sup>113</sup> Interview with Marty Rafferty from Belfast, Ireland by author, 23 June 2021.

<sup>114</sup> Dochartaigh, "Republicanism Domesticated?" 256.

<sup>115</sup> Tareq Baconi, "The Oslo Accords are Dead. Should the Palestinian Authority Live On?" *Foreign Policy*, 18 February 2020, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2020/02/18/the-oslo-accords-are-dead-should-the-palestinian-authority-live-on/>.

Relatedly, I found that for a segment of the Irish people involved in activism for Palestine, particularly of an older generation, the movement for Palestine fulfills a function of creating and sharing the republican sentiments from before the Good Friday Agreement. Peter from Belfast, as well as other activists I spoke to, diagnosed what they saw happening around them. He realized: “some people are not as interested in the revolution as it was (sic) when I was young.”<sup>116</sup> This had a direct relationship to the movement for Palestine, as Peter explained:

From the early 90s, the whole Palestinian movement has kicked off into a movement all over Ireland. A lot of people like myself - when I got involved as a real activist [for Palestine] in the 90s that was because the Irish republican socialist nationalism had sort of waned a little with the peace process. It was something to channel your energy into.<sup>117</sup>

For Peter, engagement in the movement for Palestine is not only an extension of his republican activism and beliefs, but also an active, concrete way of channeling and perhaps externalizing sentiments for which there was now less of a place in Irish society. Similarly, a young activist I encountered at a protest action in Belfast confirmed that for him, the movement for Palestine had provided a way into Irish republicanism too. In this way, it becomes clear that activism for Palestine fulfills another function within the present-day political landscape in Ireland. That is, not only to draw connections between splintered groups of republicans, but also to revive a shared sense of revolutionary consciousness and resistance. In this way, comparison is catastrophic in the creative sense, in that it allows for new political possibilities.

While there was a clear overlap between those involved in Irish republican activism (both in the past and in the present) and those involved in the Irish movement for Palestine, there are attempts to uncouple this close political connection to gather support from Palestine from across communities in Ireland, sometimes even by resisting comparisons between Palestine and Ireland. As Catherine said: “[people] have this attitude that if you support Palestine, you’re a republican. Or if you support Palestine, you support the IRA. Freedom for Palestine computes in their mind to reunification of Ireland.”<sup>118</sup> She continued: “It’s tough to get a look at them and go: No, I don’t support any political party, and I’m not a member of any political party.”<sup>119</sup>

In some instances, people brought up the need to undo activism for Palestine of its explicit republican or nationalist associations, even if only for strategic reasons. As Ryan said:

Here in Ireland, it’s very easy for people to pick something and say ‘no, we can’t do that because it’s green’ or ‘no we can’t do that because it’s Irish.’ We wanted to steer clear of that. Even in protests you would never have seen tricolors. It would be the Palestine flag only. For the Palestinian struggle, we need – and they need – as much support as possible without alienating a section of the community by raising a tricolor or raising a Union Jack.<sup>120</sup>

Therefore, Ryan admitted that he preferred not to use comparative statements in his activism for Palestine, despite the fact that he strongly feels that the situations are comparable.

As we have seen, activism for Palestine plays a distinctive role within the Irish political landscape by bringing together Northern and Southern experiences of British occupation as well as splintered republican groups. Catherine, Ryan, and others, however, spoke of the need to go further by transcending the division between republicans and loyalists for the sake of justice for

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<sup>116</sup> Digital interview with Peter Kelly from Belfast, Ireland by author, 17 February 2021.

<sup>117</sup> Ibid.

<sup>118</sup> Digital interview with Catherine Hutton from Derry, Ireland by author, 17 March 2021.

<sup>119</sup> Ibid.

<sup>120</sup> Digital interview with Ryan Moore from Derry, Ireland by author, 17 February 2021.

Palestine. Similarly, when I attended the first meeting of the newly formed activist group Cairde Palestine, started by a younger generation of activists and university students, transcending West Belfast was a crucial matter of concern. While the meeting was held in West Belfast, they were now looking for a venue for their first action for Palestine and debated different areas of town and their political leanings. They reached consensus to hold the event in the most “neutral” area of Belfast, the city center, in the hope of attracting and thus connecting a more diverse crowd.

On most occasions, however, the transcendence of the division between loyalist and republican communities through activism for Palestine remained a distant goal, as any hopes of connection were quickly tempered by the realization of vastly different and uneven positions, manifested ever so clearly by the Israeli hexagrams and Union Jacks adorning loyalist streets side by side. As we have seen, support for Palestine is bringing together nationalist and republican communities in Ireland across the North and the South, and is, through exposure to Palestinian anti-imperialism, more likely to lead to a rediscovery and strengthening of Irish republican sentiments than a reconnection with loyalist or unionist groups. In this way, support for Palestine and Israel resembles a proxy for the struggle over a united Ireland, as Catherine describes:

[The Derry City Council] has adopted a policy of supporting Palestine and the Palestinian struggle, but the unionist counsellors always vote against anything to do with Palestine. Always. You’re constantly coming up against this. And it’s reinforced by the fact that it’s always nationalist counsellors that are proposing it.

Recent years have seen the proxy conflict grow through the burning of both Israeli and Palestinian flags during annual ritual bonfires.<sup>121</sup> While Palestinian flags have been raised by republican communities for decades, the Israeli flag only appeared in loyalist areas in the spring of 2002, which is when loyalist concerns about the internal political situation coalesced with international counter-terrorism efforts and Islamophobia post 9/11.<sup>122</sup> Andrew Hill and Andrew White argue that the use of these flags signifies continued and heightened antagonism in the North of Ireland that is displaced onto symbolism because of the current situation of official and seeming “peace.”<sup>123</sup> The resonance of Palestinian and Israeli symbolisms in Ireland, in other words, functions precisely to maintain the political fault lines today. The function of these symbolisms within the Irish political landscape is likely to complicate any endeavors to transcend this proxy conflict.

For most people I spoke to, the transcendence of political fault lines is not the intention. Comparisons with Palestine are meant to bolster an anti-imperial politics, one which will not end until the occupation of the North and the occupation of Palestine have ended. In this sense, undoing comparisons with Palestine from their republican connotations would mean undoing the resonances that make Palestine so meaningful in Ireland in the first place. Most of my interlocutors acknowledged that comparisons with Palestine expose continued political tensions in the present-day climate of seeming peace but see this as a hopeful sign for a renewed and reinvigorated republicanism. While this mode of resonance with Palestine does not connect all Northern and Southern experiences, especially not those on the loyalist side, it does strengthen the historical struggle for a free and united Ireland.

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<sup>121</sup> *Irish Times*, “Eleventh Night: Tricolours, SF posters, Celtic and Palestine flags burned,” 12 July 2019, <https://www.irishtimes.com/news/ireland/irish-news/eleventh-night-tricolours-sf-posters-celtic-and-palestine-flags-burned-1.3954698>; *The Times of Israel*, “Israeli flags burned by Northern Irish nationalists,” 16 August 2018, <https://www.timesofisrael.com/israeli-flags-burned-by-Northern-irish-nationalists/>.

<sup>122</sup> Hill and White, “The Flying of Israeli Flags in Northern Ireland,” 31-50.

<sup>123</sup> *Ibid.*

## Conclusion

In this chapter, I have conducted an ethnographic study of Irish comparisons with Palestine by gauging how comparability between Ireland and Palestine is made in practice. I have focused on how comparisons with Palestine resonate in Ireland and how these comparisons draw and transform political relationships. My analysis has shown that comparisons with Palestine intervene in the Irish political landscape in catastrophic ways by resonating with Irish history and people's emotional worlds in the present, by forging new connections, and by altering Irish realities of partition and division. While comparisons with Palestine were presented as historical at first glance in that they contrasted the Palestinian contemporaneous struggle with Ireland's eight-century conflict with Britain, it became increasingly clear that this distinction was neither straightforward nor tenable. Indeed, comparisons with Palestine proved to resonate in the present with experiences of similar events, for instance of military presence, discrimination and displacement, and violence, especially in the North of Ireland. These experiences were not only triggered involuntarily but were also actively mobilized to respond to perceived injustice in Palestine.

This chapter showed that Irish comparisons with Palestine, and by extension international comparisons more broadly, can have a mobilizing and even (re)connecting effect. I found that comparisons with Palestine can function as a conduit through which Southern and Northern experiences of British imperialism and present-day occupation can be translated and reconnected. Thereby bridging the gap created after the partition of Ireland, uncovering structures of complex complicity, and challenging alienating narratives about the Irish struggle as historical and the Troubles as a localized ethnic or religious conflict. Furthermore, and especially in the North of Ireland, activism for Palestine brings together groups of republicans that have become divided over the current state of "peace" in Ireland in the wake of the Good Friday Agreement, fulfilling an important role in reviving shared sense of revolutionary consciousness and resistance to British influence in Ireland.

There are even hopes that efforts to mobilize and (re)connect in the service of justice for Palestine could transcend (and thereby unite) the different communities on the island of Ireland. Yet, attempts to undo the involvement in the struggle for Palestine of its republican associations are unlikely to succeed because of the explicit as well as implicit meanings Palestine has gained within the Irish political landscape through a comparative register. While comparisons with Palestine can bring increasing connection within and between nationalist and republican communities in the North and the South, they also heighten the stakes for what is yet to come for Ireland itself, enacting a vision of Irish liberation from colonialism that is fundamentally incongruent with loyalist views of the future.

## Chapter 5 – Revisiting the Ruins of Apartheid: Comparing South Africa and Palestine

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We had received a call of a house demolition in Silwan just outside David City [Jerusalem]. When we got there, we saw more than 50 IDF [soldiers], more than 15 cars, more than 3 bulldozers breaking down the house. And then on the corner, I remember seeing an old man pulling this old lady back. She wanted to get some valuable things from the house and this old man was pulling her back. I remember on my far left there were three children sitting down crying. For me, it came back instantly: this is how my family was uprooted from their land. ... Personally, the struggle and solidarity with Palestine is not what I do, it's what I am. It's a lifestyle for me because I see myself, I see my family. I see the struggle of Black people in South Africa, I see it in Palestinians, so everything for me makes sense now.<sup>1</sup>

### Introduction

Palestine is often viewed through the prism of South Africa, where the formal end of South African apartheid stands for the hope of a liberated Palestine.<sup>2</sup> Such comparisons convey the similarities between the legal infrastructures of apartheid South Africa and contemporary Israel. At the same time, the trajectories of South Africa and Palestine in the present are often seen as starkly different, most clearly manifested through the contrast between the political freedom of contemporary South Africans and the continued political suppression of Palestinians. In some comparisons, the South African movement against apartheid becomes posited as a success in contrast to the liberation struggle for Palestine.<sup>3</sup> In part due to its comparative success, the trajectory of the South African anti-apartheid movement becomes portrayed as a model for Palestinians to work towards Palestine's "South Africa moment."<sup>4</sup>

These comparisons build on a longer history of connections between South Africa and Palestine. From the shared history of British imperialism and settler colonialism to the formation of connected liberation movements with similar tactics, there have been many synergies between South African and Palestinian political experiences.<sup>5</sup> South African and Palestinian liberation movements have also been condemned in similar ways, most prominently through Cold War narratives that saw them both as instances of communism.<sup>6</sup> In the years thereafter, parallels were drawn between the negotiation processes in the South African transition away from apartheid, and the formulation of the Oslo Accords, which occurred around the same time in the first half of the 1990s.<sup>7</sup> Incorporating these various historical elements of comparability, present-day comparisons between South Africa and Palestine (and contestations thereof) have come to center primarily on the similar experiences of apartheid.

Yet, as I show in this chapter, the contemporary crafting of comparability between apartheid in South Africa and Palestine is more multifaceted, contested, and indeed catastrophic

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<sup>1</sup> Digital interview with Ntuthuko Nkosi from Newcastle, South Africa by author, 17 November 2021.

<sup>2</sup> Examples include Bakan and Abu-Laban, "Israel/Palestine, South Africa and the 'one-state solution,'" Davis, *Apartheid Israel*, Pappé, *Israel and South Africa*.

<sup>3</sup> Mona N. Younis, *Liberation and Democratization: The South African and Palestinian National Movements* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000), 1.

<sup>4</sup> Omar Barghouti, *BDS: Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions: The Global Struggle for Palestinian Rights* (Chicago: Haymarket Books (2011), 11.

<sup>5</sup> Peteet, "The work of comparison," 247-281.

<sup>6</sup> Marjorie N. Feld, *Nations Divided: American Jews and the Struggle Over Apartheid* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014).

<sup>7</sup> Amneh Badran, *Zionist Israel and Apartheid South Africa: Civil society and peace building in ethnic-national states* (London: Routledge, 2009); Heribert Adam and Kogila Moodley, *Seeking Mandela: Peacemaking between Israelis and Palestinians* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2005).

than it appears. While the comparison with apartheid in Palestine often resonates with those who have lived through the apartheid era in South Africa, it does not do so with everyone and, even with those it does resonate with, experiences are often dissimilar. This chapter shows that comparisons with apartheid in Palestine are growing more layered through the acknowledgement of what I will call the “ruins” of apartheid in present-day South Africa. With inequality, unemployment, and corruption shaping present-day realities for South Africans, recent comparisons with Palestine increasingly challenge South Africa as the example to follow and present it rather as a warning sign. Yet, some emergent comparisons go even further, claiming that to really grasp the predicament of both South Africa and Palestine today, more reciprocal comparisons are needed that reveal the wider relations between race and capital spanning across these contexts. Engaging with these developments, this chapter shows that the comparisons between South Africa and Palestine compel a revisiting of the ruins of apartheid.

As in the previous chapter, I interrogate how and why activists, politicians, and religious leaders in South Africa compare their experiences to those of Palestinians. Previous scholarship has often focused on whether comparisons between apartheid in South Africa and Palestine are appropriate.<sup>8</sup> This chapter, in contrast, tries to understand the embeddedness and function of these comparisons within concrete settings and lived experiences. In conducting this research, I interacted with South Africans of different ages, genders, socio-economic backgrounds, religious orientations, and racial identifications. As we will see in this chapter, the political landscape in South Africa is still very much divided across racial lines, reinforced by social class. For this reason, I emphasize the interviewees’ racial identifications or other characteristics at some points throughout this chapter, whenever either I or an interviewee considered it important to situate a particular viewpoint. I capitalize racial identifiers such as Black, Colored, and White to underline that they refer to concrete and situated historical communities, rather than general identifications. By mentioning these identifications, I do not mean to imply that an interviewee’s positional characteristics determine their viewpoints or opinions in any straightforward way. As I have argued in Chapter 3, I prefer thinking of someone’s position as a fragile, dynamic outcome of bodily relations with others rather than as a fixed position.<sup>9</sup> Instead, I try to show how these positional characteristics matter in terms of someone’s own interpretation of their views or life experiences, or in the way that I, in turn, came to read and understand the affective and political charge of their stories.

This chapter unfolds in five sections. The first section of this chapter examines how the comparability between Palestine and South Africa during the apartheid era is established. It discusses how the historical experiences of forced removal, separation, and humiliation taking place in Palestine resonate with people who bore the brunt of apartheid in South Africa. This section also brings to light how the issue of Palestine, historically seen as a “Muslim issue” in South Africa, has become increasingly tied to discussions on race and apartheid, which culminated in the formation of the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) movement.

The second section questions how comparisons between apartheid in South Africa and Palestine are contested in present-day South Africa. It discusses how Palestine is interpreted from within religious registers and centers on the work religious leaders do, primarily in Black communities, to underline the comparability of experience of apartheid. It also takes us to other

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<sup>8</sup> E.g., Ran Greenstein, “Israel/Palestine and the apartheid analogy: Critics, apologists and strategic lessons,” in *The case for sanctions against Israel*, ed. Audrea Lim (London: Verso, 2011), 149-158.

<sup>9</sup> Van Wingerden, “Unmastering Research.”

regions of the political landscape, showing the stakes of comparison to Palestine within those White communities who have historically benefited from apartheid in South Africa. Lastly, it considers if the lack of lived experience of apartheid amongst the “born free” generation in present-day South Africa may undermine the resonance of comparisons with Palestine.

The third section of this chapter deepens the understanding of how comparisons with Palestine resonate in South Africa, specifically through what I call the ruins of apartheid. This section conveys that lived experiences in present-day South Africa, specifically those of inequality, also resonate with realities you would find in Palestine. Based on fieldwork in a historical township, it underlines the frustrations people express when comparisons with Palestine are limited to apartheid in South Africa as a historical experience. Zooming in on the roots of these frustrations, this section introduces land dispossession and unequal economic structures as ruinous legacies of the apartheid era.

The fourth section of this chapter focuses on how comparisons with Palestine are shaped through the politics of present in South Africa. It discusses how the dominance of the political networks of the African National Congress has made it difficult for people to challenge the present-day realities of apartheid in South Africa and has resulted in limited comparisons to Palestine that leave South African apartheid in the past. It considers attempts to depart from these political networks through more recent and critical comparisons with Palestine. These comparisons challenge South Africa’s present-day leadership and convey the betrayal of hopes people for the post-apartheid era. In so doing, they position South Africa as a warning sign for Palestinians.

The fifth and final section of this chapter examines how the present-day realities in South Africa and Palestine can be translated and challenged through more reciprocal comparisons. Where comparisons made by South Africans throughout this chapter tended to convey what Palestinians can learn from South Africa – whether a model or a warning sign, this final section questions the one-sidedness of these comparisons. It considers comparisons between South Africa and Palestine that draw linkages between these contexts and show how they emerge out of wider relations of race and capital. Based on these reciprocal comparisons, this section repositions the ruination of both South Africa and Palestine as an active process in the present.

### **1. Boycotts, Barriers, and Bantustans: Comparing South Africa and Palestine**

This section discusses how comparability is made between apartheid South Africa and Palestine. In this section, I focus specifically on what experiences people evoked in crafting comparability with Palestine. By narrating these experiences, I also provide insight into the history of apartheid in South Africa, and the ways in which this history intersects with the laws and infrastructures that shape the lives of Palestinians today. As we saw in the previous chapter, the crafting of comparability is not always voluntary, and may be engendered by unintentional associations to other times and places. In focusing on comparisons between apartheid South Africa and Palestine, we again see how events resonance with moments in a painful past, but also how they are actively mobilized to form political alliances.

I started this chapter with a story of a house demolition in East Jerusalem, told to me by Ntuthuko, an activist and priest in the Kwazulu-Natal region of South Africa. As a young Black man born in 1986, Ntuthuko is not considered part of what South Africans nowadays call the “Born Free” generation; the generation born after the formal end of apartheid in 1994. Still,

Ntuthuko was young when apartheid was abolished, so memories of this era came mostly in the form of recollections passed on to him by his family members, ancestors who had once borne the full brunt of apartheid. The house demolition Ntuthuko witnessed in Palestine conjured up a familiar, if faraway, story of catastrophe. As he saw the old Palestinian couple struggling to leave their belongings behind, Ntuthuko was reminded of another couple of an eerily similar situation: that of his own grandparents. In sharing this story, Ntuthuko wanted me to hear it in the same way he had been told by his own grandmother:

My grandmother would say: “it was in the morning when the cows had gone for grazing. We started hearing the rumbles and my legs started shaking. It was the trucks coming to get us. I was cooking, preparing for lunch so that the kids will find warm food when they come back from school. I could not finish cooking because the White man was already gathering our things into these trucks. I begged: ‘Please, may I take the stove that I am cooking on?’ It was a portable stove made of tin. ‘May I take it into the truck with me so that I can continue cooking for my children?’ My husband was standing there, looking at his field right before the harvest. That day we left our harvest and the work we had been doing for months and months and months. It was left behind for White men’s riches. We also left behind our cattle - we don’t even know who took them – and we were moved into a place that even today I cannot call home.”<sup>10</sup>

Seeing the scene of the home demolition in Palestine gave Ntuthuko a better understanding of his own painful family history and provided some sense of why his grandfather had died of a heart attack only shortly after this traumatic event. The forced removal of Ntuthuko’s family had happened in 1967. This was a central year in the mass forced removal of Black South Africans under apartheid. The removals sought to implement the “Group Areas Act” which mandated residential segregation on the basis of race.<sup>11</sup> Black South Africans were moved to overcrowded and infertile places that were to become “independent” Bantustans, meaning territories set aside for particular groups of African people, whereas Indians and “Colored” people were moved to places with slightly better material conditions.<sup>12</sup> Residential segregation was intended to ensure “separate development”, which depended on the strict organization of the relations, rights, and privileges of the races.<sup>13</sup> In practice, it meant far-reaching restriction of residence, employment, education, marriage, social security, and voting rights, with opportunities, wealth, and resources being concentrated amongst the White minority.

The South African apartheid government had come to power in May 1948, only two weeks after the establishment of the state of Israel.<sup>14</sup> Although the ideology of apartheid and some of its policy frameworks went back several decades, the 1948 election marked its formal institutionalization. Faced with rapid rates of Black urbanization since World War II, the South African ruling National Party introduced its policies of apartheid, meaning separateness in

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<sup>10</sup> Digital interview with Ntuthuko Nkosi from Newcastle, South Africa by author, 17 November 2021.

<sup>11</sup> Alan Mabin, "Comprehensive segregation: The origins of the Group Areas Act and its planning apparatuses," *Journal of Southern African Studies* 18, no. 2 (1992): 405-429.

<sup>12</sup> Under apartheid, people racialized as “Indian” included those of other Asian ancestry. Those of Asian ancestry were thus all categorized as the same racial group. Those racialized as “Colored” were people of mixed heritage. It referred to descendants of people from two (or more) ethnicities, which in practice meant everyone who was not white or Asian and not a member of an African indigenous group.

<sup>13</sup> Alan Baldwin, "Mass removals and separate development," *Journal of Southern African Studies* 1, no. 2 (1975): 215-227.

<sup>14</sup> The Afrikaans Reunited National Party unexpectedly came to power after World War II and merged with the Afrikaner Party to form the National Party.



Afrikaans, to appease White South Africans who felt threatened by Black political aspirations.<sup>15</sup> As noted above, apartheid as a system of rule built on longer histories of racial discrimination by the Dutch and British who had colonized South Africa in the seventeenth and nineteenth centuries respectively. By contrast, the Israeli strategy of separation between Israelis and Palestinians, called *bafrada*, became articulated in explicit terms only in the 1990s.<sup>16</sup> While practices of land expropriation and the logic of Judaization already prevailed in all regions under Israeli control, this is when “creeping apartheid” intensified through the construction of the physical barrier and explicit laws that separated Israeli and Palestinian populations.<sup>17</sup> During the South African apartheid era, there were relations of mutual support between Israel and South Africa. While Israel denied its ties to the apartheid government, in secret, economic and military deals were cut, which bolstered South Africa’s military and policing capabilities and provided Israel with raw materials and testing ground for new weaponry.<sup>18</sup>

Through interviews, I got a strong sense of the resonance of Palestinian realities of land expropriation and separation among those who had experienced South African apartheid, and the catastrophic ways in which these Palestinian realities could affect them. This resonance was most palpable in the experiences of Black South Africans who had lived through the apartheid era and who also witnessed Israeli apartheid firsthand. One of those South Africans was Moss, a Black pastor and outspoken advocate of justice in his seventies. While the comparability of the situations in Palestine and South Africa was clear to Moss now, this had not always been the case. Yet, his own experience with apartheid always compelled him to ask questions. As Moss shared:

There would be some stories on the telly about Palestine and the struggle with Israel. I didn’t understand it. I felt something was off with the pictures I was seeing. ... But whenever I see any kid with stones confronting an armed military vehicle, I automatically connect to the kid with the stone, because I’ve learned to understand through our struggles that when young people do that, they are always right. They don’t do that if they have no case. They don’t put their life in danger if they have no case.<sup>19</sup>

When Moss was given the opportunity to visit Israel as part of a meeting between religious leaders, he wanted to visit the Palestinian territories to try to have his questions answered. This was not easy, as Moss remembers: “I kept asking my hosts: I want to know the story of that young stone-throwing Palestinian, what has caused this?”<sup>20</sup> His questions and requests to speak to Palestinians were ignored, and Moss got the sense that his hosts skirted around the issue that was so important to him. At the end of the 10-day visit, Moss was asked to plant a tree in an Israeli forest. He was told that this was part of Israel’s climate efforts. Considering himself someone concerned with social and climate issues, Moss planted the tree.

Years later, Moss was invited by Palestinian activists to visit the Occupied Palestinian Territories. He was still adamant in his desire to understand the images of the rock-throwing Palestinian children he continued to see, and which he still understood as similar to his own experiences. “Those were the kind of things that we did when we were in high school in 1976

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<sup>15</sup> Heather Deegan, *The politics of the new South Africa: Apartheid and after* (Harlow: Pearson Education, 2001), 20.

<sup>16</sup> Peteet, “The work of comparison,” 260.

<sup>17</sup> Oren Yiftachel, “Creeping Apartheid” in Israel-Palestine,” *Middle East Report* 39, no. 253 (2009): 7-15.

<sup>18</sup> Sasha Polakow-Suransky, *The unspoken alliance: Israel’s secret relationship with Apartheid South Africa* (New York: Random House, 2010).

<sup>19</sup> Digital interview with Moss Ntsha from Johannesburg, South Africa by author, 14 December 2021.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

when the so-called Soweto riots broke out,” he told me.<sup>21</sup> Considered the bloodiest event of the apartheid era, the riots began when students from Soweto, or the South Western Townships near Johannesburg, came together to protest the introduction of Afrikaans as the official language in schools. Moss and the other protesting children were met with excessive police force, whereby hundreds of them were killed.<sup>22</sup> When Moss finally arrived in the Palestinian Territories, he was reminded of these scenes of his youth:

When I went through the checkpoints [in Palestine], it was just so traumatic, and I would remember my own experiences walking into roadblocks [in South Africa]. You know, the police would set up these roadblocks everywhere and really humiliate us. I felt the same feeling when I was there. I could see the same sort of young people, young IDF people who, like White Afrikaners, were manning the roadblocks. The experience of humiliation. The separation that was going on.<sup>23</sup>

It was only when he witnessed what life was like in the Occupied Territories that Moss understood what he deemed the “missing link” between his own experience and that of the rock-throwing Palestinian child he had seen on television: they lived in a similar system of apartheid. When he got the chance to speak to Palestinians and finally ask the questions he had already wanted to ask all those years ago, he made another shocking discovery. The Palestinians he met told him about the ruination of their villages as part of the destruction and ethnic cleansing of Palestine during the Nakba. The ruins of their villages were no longer accessible, as Palestinians were not allowed to return. To conceal the ruins of these Palestinian villages, Israel had started forestation campaigns, which were then presented as so-called green projects. Moss was informed that the Israeli forest in which he had planted a tree all those years before, had indeed, a century earlier, been a Palestinian village. Knowing that he was lured into contributing to the cover-up of a violent history so similar to his own made Moss extremely angry: “So ever since then, I was committed to being involved in the Palestinian cause.”<sup>24</sup>

Nearly everyone I spoke to in South Africa emphasized that in comparing Palestine to apartheid South Africa, the experiences of Palestinians resonate most strongly with what the Black population had to endure. Sometimes, as we also saw in Ireland, these similarities could be overwhelming and devastating. One of the people I spoke to for whom this was the case was Edwin, a Black priest in his sixties. As a young man in the 1980s, Edwin had been imprisoned twice for his activities in the anti-apartheid movement. Like hundreds of Palestinians that are detained without trial each year, Edwin had never been found guilty of any crime, but was held for months nonetheless. When Edwin visited Palestine, the resemblance between his own experiences and those of Palestinians became highly catastrophic:

I remember they asked me to come to the checkpoint early in the morning to come and see how people are treated, but I felt I couldn’t go. I just felt that I would be retraumatizing myself doing that. I couldn’t see myself actually going there and watching this happening. Some of the others went there, but I didn’t go.<sup>25</sup>

When I spoke to people that would, under apartheid, be identified as Colored or Indian, they would also speak of the trauma of forced removal, the racial tensions, and being beaten up by

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> Digital interview with Edwin Arrison from Cape Town, South Africa by author, 1 December 2021.

White mobs.<sup>26</sup> Yet, they would often emphasize their relative material welfare and safety within those townships designated for Colored or Indian people. As Suraya, a South African Indian journalist and activist in her forties underlined:

If you speak to Black South Africans my age, their memories would be of night raids and people getting arrested on a daily basis. Much more violent memories, whereas mine are just incidents where you remember how different life is for White people than for everyone else.<sup>27</sup>

Yet, for a while, it was not Black South Africans who put forward the comparison with Palestine. Attention to and activism for Palestine in South Africa has historically been most common in Indian Muslim communities, descendants from immigrants as well as indentured laborers who were forcibly taken to South Africa in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. South African Muslims often feel a duty to stand with their Muslim “brothers and sisters” in Palestine, and to protect Al-Aqsa Mosque in Jerusalem, one of the holiest sites in Islam. For this reason, the issue of Palestine was for a long time primarily seen in South Africa as a “Muslim issue.” This continues to be an issue today, as young Indian-Muslim organizer Humairaa shared:

Because the Palestine solidarity movement is Indian dominated, I feel like they try to monopolize the movement, which is very unfortunate. And maybe that is not their intention, but it does sometimes come across that way. And they sort of keep other people of other races out of it.<sup>28</sup>

Young Black organizer William shared how this affected him: “I was very skeptical about participating in Palestinian activism just because in South Africa it’s viewed as something that only appeals to the Muslim demographic.”<sup>29</sup>

Despite these religious connotations in South African society, the comparison between Palestine and South African apartheid had first surfaced in Palestinian political discourse and scholarship in the mid-1970s.<sup>30</sup> This was not in a religious context. Rather, it was part of linkages that emerged between the PLO and the African National Congress (ANC), the liberation movement and political party that spearheaded the struggle against apartheid in South Africa. These linkages emerged within the context of the non-aligned movement, as discussed in chapter 3, and translated into material support in the form of training, and communication and supply links.<sup>31</sup> For a while in the 1970s, the comparison between apartheid and Zionism “gained broad reach.”<sup>32</sup> Yet, it was only after the 1990s, when the Israeli policy of *bafrada* – separateness – was explicitly articulated, that the comparison explicitly started to center on the two systems as two forms of apartheid.<sup>33</sup> In the 1990s and 2000s, these comparisons started reverberating across South African society, whereby the issue of Palestine became not only seen as a “Muslim issue”, but a wider apartheid issue too.

The major turning point for the crafting of comparability between the two systems as systems of apartheid was in 2001, when the World Conference Against Racism was held in Durban. During preparatory meetings for the conference, a text was formulated which identified Zionism as a form of racism. In Durban, negotiations over the wording of this text resulted in a

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<sup>26</sup> Digital interview with Naazim Adam from Johannesburg, South Africa by author, 23 December 2021.

<sup>27</sup> Digital interview with Suraya Dadoo from Johannesburg, South Africa by author, 15 December 2021.

<sup>28</sup> Interview with Humairaa Mayet in Johannesburg, South Africa by author, 25 February 2022.

<sup>29</sup> Digital interview with William Shoki from Johannesburg, South Africa by author, 28 February 2022.

<sup>30</sup> Peteet, “The Work of Comparison,” 257.

<sup>31</sup> United States Senate, *Situation in South Africa: Hearings Before the Committee on Foreign Relations* (Washington: US Government Printing Office, 1986), 52.

<sup>32</sup> Peteet, “The Work of Comparison,” 257.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

deadlock, whereby representatives from both the United States and Israel withdrew from the conference. The final text did not include any language that accused Israel of racism, but the NGO forum, held adjacent to the main conference, declared Israel to be a “racist, apartheid state.”<sup>34</sup> Outside of the conference, tens of thousands of people marched for justice for Palestine, holding signs that read “Zionism is racism” and “Israel is an apartheid state.”<sup>35</sup> At the end of the marches, Palestinian and South African organizations launched the “International Anti-Apartheid Movement Against Israel.”<sup>36</sup> For many of the South Africans I interviewed, even those who had already been in the Palestine movement before, Durban opened their eyes for the ways in which the South African history of apartheid resonated in Palestine.

In the following years, comparisons between Israeli and South African apartheid grew increasingly common, as activists, scholars, and politicians drew poignant comparisons between both systems of apartheid.<sup>37</sup> Comparability tended to be crafted by focusing on the dispossession of land and property, as voiced by Ntuthuko, segregation and repression, as emphasized by Moss, and the denial of rights, as exemplified by Edwin. Beyond “apartheid,” the term “bantustan” also became used within the context of Palestine.<sup>38</sup> These comparisons highlighted the similarities between the strategies of separation by the Israeli and the South African governments, and the legal infrastructures that sustained them. Legal arguments conveyed that Israel fulfilled the criteria of the crime against humanity of apartheid under the 1976 Apartheid Convention, the 2002 Rome Statute and customary international law.<sup>39</sup> While these legal arguments often strengthened comparisons between Israeli and South African apartheid, a few times, interviewees would argue that they should not be linked. While the comparability of concrete contexts could be subjected to debate, they argued, the Apartheid Convention provided a clear framework wherein Israeli policies and laws of separation would be directly punishable whether or not they would be similar to experiences of apartheid in South Africa.

The crafting of comparability between South Africa and Palestine, or more specifically between the apartheid regimes in Israel and South Africa before 1994, culminated in the formation of the Palestinian-led Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) movement. Started in 2005, the BDS movement was founded by Palestinians who were inspired by and modeled their struggle on the South African struggle against apartheid. The call for BDS emphasized the role of “the international community” in abolishing South African apartheid and called for international efforts to end Israeli apartheid.<sup>40</sup> While there were many factors that contributed to the end of South African apartheid, most obviously the various strands of South African opposition, both

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<sup>34</sup> Adalah, “World Conference Against Racism NGO Forum Declaration,” 3 September 2001, <https://www.hurights.or.jp/wcar/E/ngofinaldc.htm>.

<sup>35</sup> See image at *The Jerusalem Post*, “No Western state bid for speech, leading role at Durban,” 18 September 2001, <https://www.jpost.com/international/no-western-state-bid-for-speech-leading-role-at-durban-679749>.

<sup>36</sup> N’aeem Jeenah, “Palestinian Solidarity in South Africa,” *Annual Review of Islam in South Africa* no. 4 (2001).

<sup>37</sup> Noteworthy is especially former U.S. president Jimmy Carter’s *Palestine: Peace not Apartheid* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2006), which became a bestseller and generated widespread and passionate debate about the Israeli occupation and the appropriateness of the comparison with South Africa. Other examples also include Marwan Bishara, *Palestine/Israel: Peace or Apartheid: Prospects for Resolving the Conflict* (London: Zed Books, 2002); Roane Carey and Alison Weir, *The New Intifada: Resisting Israel’s Apartheid* (London: Verso, 2001); Sean Jacobs and Jon Soske, eds. *Apartheid Israel: The Politics of an Analogy* (London: Haymarket Books, 2015); and Ben White, *Israeli Apartheid: A Beginner’s Guide* (London: Pluto Press, 2014).

<sup>38</sup> E.g., Nasser Abourahme, “The Bantustan sublime: Reframing the colonial in Ramallah,” *City* 13, no. 4 (2009): 499-509; and Leila Farsakh, “Independence, cantons, or bantustans: Whither the Palestinian state?” *The Middle East Journal* 59, no. 2 (2005): 230-245.

<sup>39</sup> This crime is committed when any inhuman or inhumane act is perpetrated in the context of an institutionalized regime of systematic oppression and domination.

<sup>40</sup> *BDS Movement*, “What is BDS?” accessed 14 April 2022, <https://bdsmovement.net/what-is-bds>.

militant and non-violent, the international condemnation and pressure also played an important role.<sup>41</sup>

International efforts to isolate the South African apartheid regime started in the 1960s and intensified from the late 1980s. The 1976 Soweto riots, which Moss had experienced, were particularly important in conscientizing people internationally about the violence perpetrated by the apartheid government and its police force.<sup>42</sup> International efforts to end apartheid included campaigns for economic sanctions, different kinds of boycotts, and divestment from companies that traded or had operations in South Africa. These efforts gave South Africa a pariah status and profoundly affected its economy.<sup>43</sup> Decisive was also the change of political context during the end of the Cold War. Where the apartheid government had positioned itself as an ally in the fight against communism, the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 created an environment in which this was less of a credible argument internationally.<sup>44</sup> Under these pressures, the apartheid government reversed its ban on the ANC and other political groups in 1990 and released long-held political prisoners, including Nelson Mandela. In 1994, South Africans elected their first ANC government with Mandela as their president. For the Palestinian BDS movement, the model of international support to achieve the end of South African apartheid is presented as the way forward for the struggle for Palestinian liberation.<sup>45</sup>

The BDS movement has been highly influential in many parts of the world, with campaigns in 38 countries across Africa, the Americas, Asia, Australia, and Europe.<sup>46</sup> As a response, anti-BDS legislation has been proposed in Israel, North America, and Europe.<sup>47</sup> Since 2017, Israel has a law that explicitly prohibits foreigners who support a boycott of Israel from entering the country. While the repression of the BDS movement hinders the work of many activists, it has also been taken as a sign of its success.<sup>48</sup> Within South Africa, the call for BDS resonated strongly. BDS has received support from major South African organizations, trade unions, and public figures that were involved in the South African struggle against apartheid. “We know too well that our freedom is incomplete without the freedom of the Palestinians”, proclaimed Mandela in 1997.<sup>49</sup> When I spoke to Yusuf, a young organizer from Johannesburg involved in setting up the first BDS group in South Africa, he remembered: “For me it was, especially in the early years, a way of giving back to the international community for what they had done for us and for our liberation and for our freedom.”<sup>50</sup> Israeli media started to see the South African branch of BDS, in which Yusuf was involved, as the “‘mothership’ of the global

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<sup>41</sup> Other important factors included theological and intellectual endeavors to undermine the foundations of apartheid, as discussed in the next section, and the split between the interests of economic and political elites in South Africa.

<sup>42</sup> Julian Brown, *The Road to Soweto: resistance and the uprising of 16 June 1976* (Johannesburg: Jacana, 2016).

<sup>43</sup> Neta Crawford and Audie Klotz, eds., *How sanctions work: lessons from South Africa* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 1999).

<sup>44</sup> Adrian Guelke, “The impact of the end of the Cold War on the South African transition,” *Journal of Contemporary African Studies* 14, no. 1 (1996): 87-100.

<sup>45</sup> *The Guardian*, “Boycotts and sanctions helped rid South Africa of apartheid – is Israel next in line?” 23 May 2021, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/may/23/israel-apartheid-boycotts-sanctions-south-africa>.

<sup>46</sup> *BDS Movement*, “Join a BDS campaign,” accessed 11 August 2022, <https://bdsmovement.net/get-involved/join-a-bds-campaign>.

<sup>47</sup> Binding anti-BDS legislation exists in Germany, the United States, and the United Kingdom. Non-binding anti-BDS resolutions have been adopted in Austria, Canada, Czech Republic, France, Germany, the Netherlands, and Spain.

<sup>48</sup> *Middle East Monitor*, “Repression of the BDS movement is a sure sign of its success,” 29 November 2018, <https://www.middleeastmonitor.com/20181129-repression-of-the-bds-movement-is-a-sure-sign-of-its-success/>.

<sup>49</sup> Nelson Mandela, “Address by President Nelson Mandela at International Day of Solidarity with Palestinian People,” 4 December 1997, [http://www.mandela.gov.za/mandela\\_speeches/1997/971204\\_palestinian.htm](http://www.mandela.gov.za/mandela_speeches/1997/971204_palestinian.htm).

<sup>50</sup> Digital interview with Yusuf [pseudonym] from Johannesburg, South Africa by author, 7 December 2021.

anti-Israel movement.”<sup>51</sup> In 2012, the ANC also officially endorsed the BDS movement. Yet, despite the popularity of the BDS movement across South Africa, this support, and the wider comparisons between apartheid in South Africa and Palestine did not resonate evenly across the South African political landscape. The next section will center on how these comparisons became contested within South Africa.

## 2. Contested Comparisons: Challenging Apartheid Comparisons

After discussing how comparability is established between South Africa in the apartheid era and Palestine, this section focuses on how these comparisons are contested in present-day South Africa. While we have seen that comparisons with Palestine can resonate deeply with those who hold memories of apartheid in South Africa, the crafting of comparability between apartheid in South Africa and Palestine is multifaceted and contested. Comparisons with Palestine resonate in very uneven ways, corresponding to the fractured political landscape in South Africa. While the previous section has underlined the convergence of the anti-apartheid struggle and the fight for Palestinian liberation, this section shows how comparisons between these experiences of apartheid have become contested in different ways.

The Black interviewees introduced in the previous section were religious leaders. This is not a coincidence. Coming from a relatively secular background and society, I failed to register at first how much religious connotations mattered to South African understandings of Israel and Palestine. As we have seen in the previous section, the crafting of comparability between Palestine and South Africa underlines the similarities between the experiences of Palestinians and Black South Africans under apartheid (as well as, to a lesser extent, people identified as “Indian” or “Colored”). Yet, through interviews, I learned that the experiences of Palestinians did not necessarily resonate with everyone who held memories of apartheid. As young priest Ntuthuko explained: “Whenever a Black South African hears the word Israel, they think of heaven, they think ‘we cannot curse Israel, the one who curses Israel will be cursed.’”<sup>52</sup> Moss also conveyed some of these associations: “In the Bible, they talk about the Philistines. For us, the equation of the Palestinians and the Philistines was almost assumed. So, these Palestinians, these are the guys that, in the Old Testament, used to harass David.”<sup>53</sup> As Moss remembered: “Once, I was inviting a bishop to a pro-Palestinian event, and he blatantly asked me: Do you want me to fight against God?”<sup>54</sup>

I found that some religious leaders in South Africa are very active in challenging these religious associations and underlining the comparability between events in Palestine and the (historical) experiences of apartheid in South Africa. To make possible the resonance of Palestinian experiences, the religious leaders I spoke to tried to reconstrue the meanings of Israel and Palestine in the minds of believers. As Ntuthuko emphasized: “We’re teaching about the State of Israel [in church], and the differences between the State of Israel and the Israelites. We’re spending so much time decolonizing these beliefs.”<sup>55</sup> Alternative, priest Edwin recalls:

What I have actually done several times when I’ve been asked to preach, is that I have asked the congregation to say the word ‘Palestine’ out loud with me, and they sort of shout it out.

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<sup>51</sup> *The Jerusalem Post*, “Taking the war to the BDS activist,” 4 June 2017, <https://www.jpost.com/Arab-Israeli-Conflict/Taking-the-war-to-the-BDS-activists-485087>.

<sup>52</sup> Digital interview with Ntuthuko Nkosi from Newcastle, South Africa by author, 17 November 2021.

<sup>53</sup> Digital interview with Moss Ntlha from Johannesburg, South Africa by author, 14 December 2021.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>55</sup> Digital interview with Ntuthuko Nkosi from Newcastle, South Africa by author, 17 November 2021.

The reason why I do that is because the word 'Palestine' is never used in churches, it's very seldom used in churches, so this is a way of voicing the word and making sure that the word and the people do not disappear from our imagination, from our thinking, and from our prayers.<sup>56</sup>

This contestation over the religious meanings of Israel and Palestine can itself be taken as comparable to the religious struggle over the meaning of apartheid back in South Africa. The dominant church of the Afrikaner people, the Dutch Reformed Church, was instrumental in developing an ideology of apartheid based on religious norms and values.<sup>57</sup> This was one of the pillars upon which the system of apartheid in South Africa rested. It was through the reinterpretation of Christianity and the development of a Black theology of liberation that religious leaders and churches were able to challenge the legitimacy of apartheid, contributing to its ultimate end.<sup>58</sup> The 1985 Kairos Document, for example, challenged the Christian churches in South Africa through an alternative Biblical understanding that God always sides with the oppressed.<sup>59</sup> For South Africans I spoke to, this history of liberation theology led to a focus on how to also challenge and debunk the religious legitimization of Zionism in the present-day. South African religious leaders who had been involved in reinterpreting Christianity, such as the late Archbishop Desmond Tutu, put considerable emphasis on challenging established beliefs about Palestine. For Ntuthuko, Edwin, and Moss, this constituted their primary task. As Moss stated: "I think my task as a Christian public theologian is to debunk the myth that God and Jesus were in the tanks that executed the Nakba."<sup>60</sup>

Akin to these efforts by Christian theologians, Jewish groups in South Africa have also put forward interpretations of religious traditions that challenge the underpinnings of Zionism. For example, by interpreting the Jewish concept *tikkun olam*, meaning "repairing the world" to support social action and justice for Palestine.<sup>61</sup> South African Jews are often descendants from Western and Eastern European immigrants who came to South Africa from the earlier nineteenth and twentieth centuries, fleeing poverty and prosecution.<sup>62</sup> While most Jewish communities and institutions in South Africa were quietly dismissive or distant from the struggle against apartheid, there was always a vocal minority that did speak out.<sup>63</sup> Overall, White Jewish people were overrepresented in the anti-apartheid movement compared to other groups of White people.<sup>64</sup> Across Jewish communities in South Africa today, there is a profound tension between the majority of people who support Zionism, and a vocal minority that tries to extend the tradition of social action to support Palestinians in their struggle against apartheid.

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<sup>56</sup> Digital interview with Edwin Arrison from Cape Town, South Africa by author, 1 December 2021.

<sup>57</sup> Susan Rennie Ritner, "The Dutch Reformed Church and Apartheid," *Journal of Contemporary History* 2, no. 4 (1967): 17-37; Jennifer Nelson, "The role the Dutch Reformed Church played in the rise and fall of apartheid," *Journal of Hate Studies* 2 (2002): 63.

<sup>58</sup> Rupe Simms, "Black theology, a weapon in the struggle for freedom: A Gramscian analysis," *Race and Society* 2, no. 2 (2000): 165-193.

<sup>59</sup> Bonganjalo Goba, "The Kairos Document and its implications for liberation in South Africa," *Journal of Law and Religion* 5, no. 2 (1987): 322.

<sup>60</sup> Digital interview with Moss Ntsha from Johannesburg, South Africa by author, 14 December 2021.

<sup>61</sup> BDS South Africa, "South African Jews Welcome Parliament's Rejection of Israeli Invite," 10 August 2017, <https://www.bdssouthafrica.com/consumer-boycott/south-african-jews-welcome-parliaments-rejection-israeli-invite/>.

<sup>62</sup> Not all Jewish people in South Africa are descendants of European immigrants, there are also Black South Africans who identify with Judaism, such as the Lemba people. See: Noah Tamarin, *Genetic Afterlives: Black Jewish Indigeneity in South Africa* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2020).

<sup>63</sup> Franklin Hugh Adler, "South African Jews and Apartheid," *Patterns of Prejudice* 34, no. 4 (2000): 23-36.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*

Whenever South African Jews speak out about Palestine, they often face a strong backlash. The gravity of this dawned on me when I spoke to Sarah, a Jewish woman from Johannesburg in her twenties. Growing up in a Reform Jewish community, Sarah believed in a progressive form of Judaism that is rooted in engagement with societal issues. As a teenager, Sarah had been active in a Jewish youth group. One of the things organized by this youth group was a gap year in Israel. All the cool kids in Sarah's youth group would go to Israel and they would come back with eyebrow piercings and hippie clothes. Sarah said that she "always wanted to be them."<sup>65</sup> Yet, when her time finally came to go to Israel, Sarah started doubting: "I don't know if I should go because I don't know if I'm a Zionist," she thought.<sup>66</sup> Others in the youth group would tell her: "you don't have to worry about that now, you should just go and find out."<sup>67</sup> Once she arrived in Israel, it wasn't long before Sarah realized that being there "was just too uncomfortable" for her and that she was "not a Zionist."<sup>68</sup> When she came back to South Africa, she started a Jewish initiative for justice in Palestine. While she now found others who shared her points of view on Israel and Palestine, she was afraid of sharing her views with the Jewish youth group and wider Jewish community she was a part of, so she "kept it a little bit secret."<sup>69</sup> Sarah's fears proved to be justified. When Sarah decided to organize an event about Palestine at her youth group, she was kicked out.

I was told more stories about how Zionist organizations in South Africa challenged discussions on Palestine and undermined comparisons with South African apartheid experiences. When I spoke to student organizers, they would tell me about how their efforts to draw parallels between South Africa and Palestine on campus would be contested by Zionist organizations. Humairaa, a student organizer at the University of the Witwatersrand in Johannesburg, told me that the openly Zionist South African Union of Jewish Students would organize events specifically at the time when the Palestine student movement would hold Israeli Apartheid Week.<sup>70</sup> These events would have a large budget, sponsored by a national Zionist organization, that would be used for free food, celebrity performances, and other things that would draw groups of students away from Israeli Apartheid Week. While these contestations show the ways in which Zionist groups attempt to intervene in the crafting of comparability between South Africa and Palestine, these concerns should not be used to conflate Zionism to Jewishness, nor to present Jews as a group with disproportionate political and economic influence in South African society compared to other groups of White people.

Contestations over the comparison with Palestine have also arisen among the South Africans who have historically benefited the most from apartheid: Afrikaner communities. Similar to Sarah's experience, the risks of speaking out against Israel as an Afrikaans person are serious. When I spoke to Marthie, an activist and researcher from Stellenbosch in her sixties, she shared that she is probably the only Afrikaans woman in her age-group to openly discuss what is happening in Palestine and make the comparison between Israeli and South African apartheid. Where the previous section considered the experiences of people who suffered under the apartheid system, Marthie exemplifies how comparisons with Palestine can also resonate with those who benefited from it, though they face much adversity. Marthie had not known much

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<sup>65</sup> Digital interview with Sarah [pseudonym] from Johannesburg, South Africa by author, 20 January 2022.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid.

<sup>70</sup> Interview with Humairaa Mayet in Johannesburg, South Africa by author, 25 February 2022.



about Palestine until one evening, when she attended a lecture on Palestine at Stellenbosch University, where she works. The lecture was catastrophic to Marthie, in that it forced her into a reevaluation of her conception of self: “I realized that I was, through my ignorance, maintaining yet another system of apartheid. I’m one of those White South Africans who did nothing to end apartheid, and it’s horrifying to me. It horrified me that I was guilty of it again.”<sup>71</sup>

As a result, Marthie decided to travel to Palestine and find out what was happening, and based on her experiences, speak out within her community. When I asked her whether this was a reckoning with the guilt of doing nothing to end apartheid in South Africa. She replied:

Obviously, I ask myself that question often. I stopped to ask that question. I can answer it this way: If I did not speak up in public about Palestine, then I would be as if I kill myself. I just couldn’t do it. And I was so scared of the path that lay ahead because I knew that what I had to share would not be welcomed in the White Afrikaans Dutch Reformed community that I’m part of.<sup>72</sup>

Though Marthie was prepared for adversity, the response from her community still shocked her. When she started speaking out about Palestine, most of her family, friends, colleagues, and acquaintances quietly distanced themselves from her. “People really thought I lost it. There are still people who think I’ve lost it,” Marthie said.<sup>73</sup> She also started receiving online messages from strangers: “I received absolute downright hate mail. They attacked me, they threatened me.”<sup>74</sup> Yet, quiet disengagement was the overwhelming response, Marthie emphasized, within her “privileged, White, comfortable, liberal” environment. I wondered whether the responses Marthie received could also be an indication of the discomfort people felt about their own role in South African apartheid. Marthie agreed: “Absolutely. If I use the word ‘apartheid’, casually over dinner, then there is outrage, because ‘why do you want to talk about that stuff? It’s behind us, let’s move on.’”<sup>75</sup> In Marthie’s environment, statements about South African apartheid - and comparisons with what is going on in Palestine - should not be uttered, because these things ought to be left in the past.

While in Marthie’s community, the notion that apartheid is in the past was used to contest and undermine comparisons of South African and Israeli apartheid, I found that the notion that apartheid is in the past also reverberated in a very different way. Interviewees wondered whether the lack of lived experience of apartheid among young people would inhibit the understanding of apartheid in Palestine. The concern here was not an intentional denial of comparability, as in the Afrikaans community, but a concern that the lack of lived experience among young people in Black, Colored, and Indian communities would unwittingly disturb the resonance of these comparisons. As pastor Moss said: “The problem we have now is that we have a generation of young people who have no historical memory of the anti-apartheid struggle and what it took to bring us where we are.”<sup>76</sup> Without the lived experience and historical memory of the South African struggle against apartheid, the concern is that the connection with Palestine would be lost. Journalist Suraya agreed:

The lack of young people – that is the real issue. ... If you speak to somebody that is younger than 27 years old, so that person is born after 1994, it’s so hard to explain to them [what is

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<sup>71</sup> Digital interview with Marthie Momberg from Stellenbosch, South Africa by author, 26 January 2022.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid.

<sup>76</sup> Digital interview with Moss Ntsha from Johannesburg, South Africa by author, 14 December 2021.

happening in Palestine]. When you say: ‘it’s like apartheid’, it’s hard for them to understand.

Their parents might have mentioned what life under apartheid was, but it is really hard.<sup>77</sup>

Yet, through people’s stories, I sensed that there was more going on than a lack of lived experience, and I was moved to further interrogate this notion of apartheid being in the past. The next section deepens the understanding of how apartheid comparisons are contested by focusing on the South African present.

### **3. The Ruins of Apartheid: Comparative Experiences in the Present**

After exploring how comparisons with Israeli apartheid are contested across the political landscape of contemporary South Africa, this section deepens the understanding of these contestations by focusing on South African apartheid as spilling over from the past. In the previous section we considered the lack of lived experience of apartheid amongst young South Africans in the crafting of comparability with Palestine. Interviewees suggested that this lack of lived experience undermined comparisons with Israeli apartheid, as they could no longer resonate with the experiences of Palestinians in the same way. Yet, through interviews and participant observation, I got the sense that there was more at stake than simply a lack of lived experience. Rather, there seemed to be a different kind of lived experience that got lost in comparative translation. As I show in this section, it is by acknowledging the lived realities of apartheid in present-day South Africa that the contestations over comparisons with Palestine become even more apparent.

After Moss and Suraya brought the lack of lived experiences of apartheid among younger people to my attention, I talked about this concern to others who shared additional viewpoints. “The lived experiences of apartheid are fading, what people learn from their homes and so forth” acknowledged Naazim, a Johannesburg-based organizer who works with young people through the Palestine Solidarity Alliance. “But” he continued,

there are new lived experiences. Experiences of inequality and poverty and lack of opportunities. There is still a sense of apartheid. There is still a sense of inequality when you go for a job. There is still inequality in terms of the wages that people earn. There is still inequality in terms of spaces that are occupied, whether social or cultural or whatever. So [young people] have their own experiences.<sup>78</sup>

Through interviews, participant observation and more informal conversations I had throughout my time in South Africa, the overwhelming sense that I got was that most people did not consider apartheid to be truly over. Therefore, I wondered whether the contention lied not so much in younger people not having an embodied understanding of the apartheid era, but rather, in the fact that the comparison between apartheid Israel and apartheid South Africa does not quite translate the embodied understandings they do have. That is: the catastrophic experiences of South Africa after 1994. Young organizer William stated this explicitly: “young South Africans don’t need the experience of apartheid to understand the ways in which the contemporary South African state failed.”<sup>79</sup> This present-day reality for people in South Africa, William contended, is as much a way into understanding injustices in Palestine as past experiences of apartheid were.

The words of William and Naazim convey that present-day realities in South Africa no longer harbor much optimism. The end of formal apartheid was hoped to usher in a “New South

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<sup>77</sup> Digital interview with Suraya Dadoo from Johannesburg, South Africa by author, 15 December 2021.

<sup>78</sup> Digital interview with Naazim Adam from Johannesburg, South Africa by author, 23 December 2021.

<sup>79</sup> Digital interview with William Shoki from Johannesburg, South Africa by author, 28 February 2022.

Africa”, which in Desmond Tutu’s words, would be a “rainbow nation” thriving through multicultural diversity. Yet, these hopes have largely evaporated. When I asked about their experiences today, interviewees tended to speak of continued economic and spatial apartheid. South Africa currently has the highest inequality rate in the world, and this inequality is quite literally built into the landscape.<sup>80</sup> With barbed wire protection walls around affluent residential areas growing higher and higher, private security has been the fastest growing industry in South Africa since the end of apartheid.<sup>81</sup> Inequality has relegated South Africa’s urban poor to apartheid-era townships and so-called informal shack settlements. While a Black middle class and elite have emerged, the lack of economic transformation and land reform means that race continues to shape inequality, with poverty, lack of resources, and unemployment overwhelmingly concentrated in Black communities.<sup>82</sup> When I spoke to history professor Noor Nieftagodien at Wits University about the trajectory of apartheid, he concluded: “the metaphor of the rainbow nation became discolored long ago.”<sup>83</sup>

In comparing Palestine to South Africa in the apartheid era, these ruins of apartheid are often lost in comparative translation. I speak of “ruins” in order to get at the materiality of the legacies of apartheid as they become built into the South African landscape. I hereby draw on emergent literatures that theorize “ruins” as the social and material remains of violent and unequal political processes, including global capitalism and colonization.<sup>84</sup> These ruins have become theorized not as melancholic reminders of a vanished past, but as durable relics of an unfolding reality. Considering the legacies of apartheid as ruins therefore does not mean understanding them “as dead matter or remnants of a defunct regime [but] to attend to their reappropriations, neglect, and strategic and active positioning within the politics of the present.”<sup>85</sup> While the legal system of apartheid in South Africa has been abolished, almost all people I spoke to emphasized that apartheid continues into the present. For this reason, they would also maintain that many of their lived experiences still resemble conditions you would find in Palestine today. As young priest Ntuthuko summarized:

What we have is a colonized freedom. Our freedom is only to vote, to move, to go to work, to choose, but it’s not where it matters: the economy, the land. ... Our wealth is still with our former colonizers. The settlers are having the best places, the Natives still live in shacks. Our lives are lives of suffering, lives of pain, unemployment. There is crime amongst one another because the rich are getting richer, so the struggle is like that. We don’t have illegal occupation, but we are still struggling for the lands that our forefathers had.<sup>86</sup>

I found that people I spoke to could often get frustrated when comparisons with Palestine would locate the catastrophe only in South Africa’s past and not take the present-day ruins of South African apartheid into account.

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<sup>80</sup> According to the Gini coefficient.

<sup>81</sup> Andy Clarno, *Neoliberal Apartheid: Palestine/Israel and South Africa after 1994* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2017), 36.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid.; Michela Marcatelli, *Naturalizing Inequality: Water, Race, and Biopolitics in South Africa* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2021); Leila Patel, “Race, Inequality and Social Welfare: South Africa’s Imperial Legacy,” in *Colonialism and Welfare*, ed. James Midgley and David Piachaud (Cheltenham: Edward Elgar Publishing, 2011), 71-84.

<sup>83</sup> Conversation with Noor Nieftagodien in Johannesburg, South Africa on 25 February 2022.

<sup>84</sup> The most important works are Ann Laura Stoler, ed., *Imperial debris: On ruins and ruination* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2013) and Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing, *The Mushroom at the End of the World: On the Possibility of Life in Capitalist Ruins* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2015). Ruins thinking has also been taking up in International Relations, e.g., Pol Bargañés-Pedreny, “From critique to affirmation in international relations,” *Global Society* 33, no. 1 (2019): 1-11; David Chandler, “The transvaluation of critique in the Anthropocene,” *Global Society* 33, no. 1 (2019): 26-44; Joanna Tidy and Joe Turner, “The intimate international relations of museums: A method,” *Millennium* 48, no. 2 (2020): 117-142.

<sup>85</sup> Stoler, *Imperial debris*, 11.

<sup>86</sup> Digital interview with Ntuthuko Nkosi from Newcastle, South Africa by author, 17 November 2021.

These frustrations became most clear when I attended local events on Palestine. My research period coincided with Amnesty International's visit to South Africa, following the launch of their latest report on "Israel's Apartheid Against Palestinians."<sup>87</sup> This report marked the first time that Amnesty International explicitly acknowledged the existence of an apartheid system in Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territories. Events were held across the country to engage in discussions with South African politicians, activists, and township residents about the apartheid system in the Palestinian context. One event was held in Lenasia, a former Indian township in Johannesburg. Many of the attendants were residents of Lenasia, meaning that many of them or their parents had been forcibly removed from other areas in South Africa under the Group Areas Act. Since the end of apartheid, Lenasia is no longer a designated Indian area, and some Black people and people of color have now taken up residence there. Yet even today, just like in the neighboring former Black townships of Soweto, less than 0.5% of the population is made up of White people. When I got to the event, I noticed that I was the only White person there. While the event centered on the Israeli system of apartheid, attendees spoke about their own histories of forced removal and the parallels with the experiences of Palestinians. But these conversations did not remain centered on the past. Attendees asked Amnesty's representative Saleh Hijazi pressing questions about their experiences in the South African present: What about the lack of economic reforms? The lack of land reforms?<sup>88</sup> One attendee at the Amnesty event in Cape Town concerned about land restitution even asked Hijazi point-blank: "what is your opinion on what is happening in this country?"<sup>89</sup>

The issue of redistributing land to the Black majority looms large in any discussion of present-day realities in South Africa. It is estimated that White South Africans, who make up 9% of the population, own 72% of the land, whereas Black South Africans, constituting 79% of the population, own only 4%.<sup>90</sup> The land issue goes back to the expropriation of land by Dutch and British colonists from the seventeenth century onwards and was given additional legislative form through the 1913 Natives Land Act, which prohibited the purchase or lease of land by Black people outside of Black reserves. The act ushered in mass forced removals of Black people and closed avenues of livelihood other than to work for White landowners. In South Africa, the issue of land dispossession is known as apartheid's "original sin."<sup>91</sup> While the ANC government has launched a land reform program in recent years, many South Africans remain frustrated by the slow pace and lack of clear commitment to meaningful redistribution. Land has become an increasingly contested issue through ongoing debates over the need for "land expropriation without compensation," meaning that the government would expropriate land in the public interest without compensating the owner.<sup>92</sup>

Yet, the issue of land distribution is often a shorthand for talking about wider structures of ownership in South Africa. As Professor Nieftagodien observed, these issues become

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<sup>87</sup> *Amnesty International*, "Israel's Apartheid Against Palestinians: Cruel System of Domination and Crime against Humanity," 1 February 2022, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/mde15/5141/2022/en/>.

<sup>88</sup> Author's fieldnotes, event organized by the Palestine Solidarity Alliance in Lenasia, Johannesburg, 23 February 2022.

<sup>89</sup> Author's fieldnotes, event organized by the Palestine Solidarity Campaign in Observatory, Cape Town, 18 February 2022.

<sup>90</sup> *South African Government*, "Land Reform," accessed 10 May 2022, <https://www.gov.za/issues/land-reform#audit>.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>92</sup> The South African government has focused on the expropriation of unused land, derelict buildings, speculative land holdings, and abandoned inner-city buildings, rather than private property. Where proponents say land expropriation without compensation is a just, needed, and equitable step, and even could go further to include privately owned-land, opponents challenge the proposal for being too radical or economically risky. They often draw comparisons with Zimbabwe, where land expropriation without compensation turned into a land grab and ended in economic disaster.

“grouped under the rubric of land” yet are more multifaceted than only land restitution.<sup>93</sup> Underlying these debates is the encompassing issue of inequality. As young organizer Sarah shared:

South Africa is a pretty fucked up place. The inequality is wild. Every day you wake up and you are strongly aware of your privilege, which I don’t think happens in Europe, because I think you can spend a day not seeing poverty, whereas in South Africa you can’t. And so, I think we kind of feel driven to be activists in order to feel better about ourselves.”<sup>94</sup>

A similar sentiment was also expressed by Marthie:

There are so many people in South Africa who are homeless. People struggle to make a living and they don’t have the energy to take on more. I mean, I’m a privileged person. I have the cushions around me to be able to be an activist.<sup>95</sup>

White communities who had access to capital during the apartheid era often - but not always - retained it, and as a result, many people like Sarah and Marthie who are a part of these communities still find themselves in privileged positions. Yet, apartheid era inequality has also transformed through the politics of present-day South Africa. Since the end of formal apartheid, the ANC government has prioritized the assimilation of Black people within the economic and political elites rather than changing the structural foundations of inequality.<sup>96</sup> These new elites of Black South Africans (epitomized by leaders such as Cyril Ramaphosa) are not simply caught in structures that existed before, but they have also “been able to strongly influence the terms of their own integration into the corporate system.”<sup>97</sup> Their economic integration was prioritized at the expense of the Black majority, which has not enjoyed this sort of upward mobility. In this sense, land restitution would be but one part of the needed transformation of the structures of ownership in South Africa. In the next section, I will take a closer look at the unequal politics of the present that impact comparisons with Palestine.

#### **4. Comparison and Corruption: South Africa as a Warning Sign**

After excavating how comparisons with Palestine become contested through the ruins of apartheid, this section focuses on how comparisons are (re)shaped by the politics of the South African present. We have seen that the ruins of apartheid, most prominently the continued inequality and material dispossession, extend into the South African present and form new modes of resonance with the occupation of Palestine. This section shows that ways of relating to Palestine often remain tied to the political networks of the ANC, but that increasingly, organizers are trying to depart from the ANC’s legacy. As a result, as we will see in this section, comparisons with Palestine are shifting and no longer position the trajectory of South Africa as an example to follow, but rather, as a warning sign.

Most activists, politicians, and religious leaders that I spoke to who were involved in the issue of Palestine had once upon a time considered themselves to be part of, or sympathetic towards, the African National Congress. Because of the ANC’s victory in achieving the end of apartheid, its presence has loomed large in most forms of collective action and social initiatives

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<sup>93</sup> Conversation between Noor Nieftagodien and author in Johannesburg, South Africa, 25 February 2022.

<sup>94</sup> Digital interview with Sarah [pseudonym] from Johannesburg, South Africa by author, 20 January 2022.

<sup>95</sup> Digital interview with Marthie Momberg from Stellenbosch, South Africa by author, 26 January 2022.

<sup>96</sup> Ayanda Kota, “South Africa’s Widespread Corruption is the Rotten Fruit of Apartheid,” *Jacobin*, 24 March 2021, <https://jacobinmag.com/2021/03/south-africa-corruption-apartheid>.

<sup>97</sup> Niall Rady and William Shoki, “We Can’t Understand South Africa’s Racial Inequalities Without Looking at Capitalism,” *Jacobin*, 11 March 2021, <https://jacobinmag.com/2021/11/south-africa-apartheid-mpofu-walsh-race-class-capitalism>.

since 1994. As we have seen in section one, the ANC has openly supported the BDS movement, and today it continues to be highly vocal on Palestine. In 2019, for example, South Africa recalled its ambassador to Israel and downgraded the Tel Aviv embassy to a liaison office.<sup>98</sup> This reflects how Palestine has become an important issue within South African politics and for some South African constituencies. As young organizer Sarah remarked: “[in South Africa] it’s quite amazing and very different to other countries in Africa and in Europe, in that if your party is seen to be supporting Palestine, then you get more votes.”<sup>99</sup>

Yet, more than half of the people I spoke to doubted the extent to which the ANC’s commitment to supporting Palestine was indeed sincere and argued that if it is, the ANC should do more. Given its importance to South African constituents, people wondered whether the issue of Palestine was not sometimes used as a political tool. As journalist Suraya shared:

There are times when I feel that it’s election nearing. Because then the issue of Palestine suddenly becomes the big topic, particularly by the ANC ... I still live in a predominantly Indian Muslim area. And so, when the ANC comes to my area, they would say things about support for Palestine. Then when they go to an area that is predominantly White and Jewish, they will probably say: oh no, we won’t be boycotting and divesting and instituting sanctions against Israel. ... I kind of think they are just scoring political points.<sup>100</sup>

This rhetoric on Palestine, some people conveyed, was not sufficiently rooted in concrete action. While people I spoke to generally applauded the downgrading of the embassy, many felt that it did not go far enough, especially given the ANC’s support for BDS and South Africa’s own apartheid history. As Suraya asked:

27 years into democracy, why does the South African government still have ties with a country that it has called an apartheid state? Why not break ties completely? ... South Africa may not be an economic powerhouse but because of our very recent history, we are a moral powerhouse. That’s the reason why the Israeli government has devoted so many resources to South Africa and making sure that the Israel lobby is so well resourced here. The phrase that is used is that South Africa is ‘Ground Zero of the BDS movement’, which means that the day that the South African government says that we are breaking ties with Israel, that will be, I think, a seismic moment.<sup>101</sup>

The continued relations between South Africa and Israel, by many I spoke to, was seen as a betrayal of South Africa’s own apartheid history.

Speaking to people who had worked for the ANC government, I got a sense of the concerns and interests that caused the ANC’s reluctance to translate its rhetoric on Palestine into action, for instance by breaking ties with Israel. As, Parvin, a longstanding activist who also worked for the foreign office for many years explained:

There was the idea that we shouldn’t isolate Israel because we have a role as a broker. I think that wasn’t ever going to bear any fruits, because I didn’t think that the Israeli side was serious. It was just going to give them credibility, more than what they should have. But you can see geopolitically at the time, why it would be appealing, and why it would look good. ...

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<sup>98</sup> *Middle East Monitor*, “South Africa embassy to Israel begins downgrading relations,” 5 April 2019, <https://www.middleeastmonitor.com/20190405-south-africa-embassy-to-israel-begins-downgrading-relations/>.

<sup>99</sup> Digital interview with Sarah [pseudonym] from Johannesburg, South Africa by author, 20 January 2022.

<sup>100</sup> Digital interview with Suraya Dadoo from Johannesburg, South Africa by author, 15 December 2021.

<sup>101</sup> *Ibid.*

It was in that kind of context of: we need to be nice to everybody. It's good for South Africa to be seen to have this role internationally as this New South Africa.<sup>102</sup>

Given that the ANC government inherited the relationship with Israel from the previous apartheid government, it came to present itself as a party that could speak to “both sides.”<sup>103</sup> In this way, the ANC would also avoid alienating the Zionist community within South Africa itself. While presenting a pro-Palestinian rhetoric, in practice, its actions would never truly jeopardize the relationship with Israel and the Zionist community.

Tensions around the lack of action by the ANC boiled over in 2019. This is when the director of BDS South Africa was accused of sexual harassment, which brought to the fore longstanding grievances with how this organization and the wider movement for Palestine in South Africa functioned. Talking to people across organizations in South Africa, I was presented with many different versions of what had happened, and views on how to move forward. Journalist Suraya summarized the main issue that people were concerned about. “I think [BDS South Africa] did great work in terms of getting the message of Palestine and the occupation out to the ANC and the ANC supporters,” Suraya said, “that certainly can't be questioned.” But Suraya also laid bare the wider problems:

To a large degree that organization was an extension almost of the ANC. And so, it was just rubber stamping whatever the ANC's positions were, which means that they weren't criticizing. Nobody in that organization - which was quite an influential organization in South Africa and around the world - nobody ever questioned or criticized the government's approach. I think that is incredibly damaging.<sup>104</sup>

Most interviewees underlined, as Suraya did, that BDS South Africa was deeply entangled with the political networks of the ANC government. As Sarah underlined, “a way for people to get a job in the ANC, was via working for what used to be called BDS.”<sup>105</sup>

In many ways, the importance of the political networks, of which BDS South Africa was a part, can be seen as an outgrowth of the apartheid era. Nepotism and corruption were patterns of practice that the apartheid government escalated in order to circumvent the international sanctions.<sup>106</sup> ANC leaders kept these patterns of practice intact, and today, political connections and loyalty to the ANC remain the primary ways of accumulating wealth and rising up the ranks in South African society. Many of the actors that were corrupt during the apartheid era even quickly reintegrated themselves in the post-apartheid order, creating “a new elite pact based on criminality and corruption.”<sup>107</sup> While the corruption of the ruling classes often manifests through outright money-laundering and other modes of economic crime, the nepotism through political networks and allegiances are just as much part of this overall environment.

Corruption and nepotism are sources of extreme frustration for most South Africans, but interviewees expressed how difficult it was for them to break their allegiance to the ANC, even if they disagreed with these practices. As Suraya explained:

I think a large part of it is because we all feel – almost everybody that is involved in Palestine solidarity in South Africa is a product of the ANC or one of the mass democratic movements. I can guarantee you that we've all had our route and we grew up with the ANC, so how can

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<sup>102</sup> Digital interview with Parvin [pseudonym] from Johannesburg, South Africa by author, 20 January 2022.

<sup>103</sup> Digital interview with Suraya Dadoo from Johannesburg, South Africa by author, 15 December 2021.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid.

<sup>105</sup> Digital interview with Sarah [pseudonym] from Johannesburg, South Africa by author, 20 January 2022.

<sup>106</sup> Hennie van Vuuren, *Apartheid Guns and Money: A Tale of Profit* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019).

<sup>107</sup> Ibid.

we criticize them? People are reluctant. And it's criticizing the ANC not just on Palestine, but on everything: corruption, everything. It's like: oh, how can we criticize the ANC? We were all a part of the ANC.<sup>108</sup>

Yet, Professor Noor Nieftagodien underlined that beyond these allegiances, people for a long time also held on to the belief that the ANC would live up to its promises:

The vast majority of people believed that the state would deliver. That all the work that had been done in the 70s and 80s and before that obviously - that the people had delivered through struggle and then through elections the government that they wanted. ... And so, there was an understandable belief that the state would deliver, and that people did not have to do anything but wait. And people waited and they waited. And when things did not happen, they waited some more.<sup>109</sup>

In the first section, we saw how comparisons between Israeli and South African apartheid were mobilized through the BDS movement to bring about Palestine's "South Africa moment" of liberation. In the celebratory moment after the end of apartheid in South Africa, narratives of South Africa's success often became contrasted with the failure of the struggle for self-determination in Palestine. For example, as Mona N. Younis writes in the year 2000:

The national movement in South Africa has proven more successful than the Palestinian national movement. In 1994, Black South Africans achieved their goal of a nonracial, democratic state in a unitary South Africa. In contrast, the PLO-led movement has not only failed to achieve the original goal of a nonsectarian, democratic state in all of Palestine, but even the less ambitious goal of such a state in the West Bank and Gaza Strip remains elusive.<sup>110</sup>

While these comparisons reflected the celebratory moment post-formal apartheid, they did not yet convey how people's lives would continue to be taunted by the ruins of apartheid, nor how the ANC would come to play a decisive role in this continuation.

When these comparisons are perpetuated in the present, they tend to retain the celebratory narrative about the ANC. Indeed, while comparisons between Palestine and South African in the apartheid era do invite critiques of the Israeli and the South African apartheid governments, they often let the ANC off the hook. This is even perpetuated through the ANC's connection to the Palestinian Authority (PA), as Suraya conveyed:

[Even] the Palestinians themselves will not the criticize the ANC. The PA will not criticize [them]. They attend all the ANC functions, and they give a vote of thanks and a statement of support and every year we do the same thing. We reaffirm the Palestinian right to self-determination blablabla. Every year, at every function.<sup>111</sup>

The reluctance to critique the ANC becomes built into the comparison with Palestine by disregarding the continued realities of apartheid, even by the Palestinian leadership itself.

To make these present-day realities of apartheid more visible, through comparison or otherwise, some movements have started to break away from the political networks of the ANC. Yet, they have retained the framework of the BDS movement, which still provides the most important mode of organizing for Palestine in South Africa (as well as globally). After the crisis with BDS South Africa, different grassroots groups across South Africa have come together to

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<sup>108</sup> Digital interview with Suraya Dadoo from Johannesburg, South Africa by author, 15 December 2021.

<sup>109</sup> Conversation with Noor Nieftagodien in Johannesburg, South Africa by author, 25 February 2022.

<sup>110</sup> Younis, *Liberation and Democratization*, 1.

<sup>111</sup> Digital interview with Suraya Dadoo from Johannesburg, South Africa by author, 15 December 2021.



form a new South Africa BDS coalition, which is less beholden to the legacy of the ANC. Young organizer William explained the rationale behind this move away from the ANC:

The ANC is a shadow of its former self. The ANC continued to claim – well into the post-apartheid period – that it was the sort of revolutionary force in South Africa, and I think people believed that for a while, and sort of remained committed to the ANC and its broader politics. And now that it doesn't represent that anymore, people don't have a political home. So, Palestinian solidarity needs to break away from that, and start from scratch to rebuild its constituency and no longer be reliant on the networks and the infrastructure and the history of the ANC. That often traps us in solidarity at an elite level, if that makes sense, so spending all our time trying to lobby the Minister of International Relations to release the right statement, rather than building the grassroots movement that can put pressure on the state to take the actions that we want.<sup>112</sup>

This shift away from the ANC reflects a wider political transformation in South Africa, which has given rise to the interrogation of established modes of comparison with Palestine. When I talked to Salim Vally, a professor and organizer through the new BDS coalition, he actively challenged established comparisons between South Africa and Palestine:

So many people talk about South Africa as a miracle, as the example to follow, and we always tell our comrades and friends in Palestine: Be careful, because we have the highest inequality in the world, poverty continues because we didn't address those issues. Yes, there are positive lessons of struggle, which the BDS movements talks about, and we can continue to do that, but don't forget about our issues.<sup>113</sup>

Taking seriously the ruinous realities of the present calls into doubt comparisons that establish South Africa as an example to follow. For many people I spoke to, it had become increasingly clear that despite the successes of the South African anti-apartheid movement back in the day, "South Africa is a really depressing story."<sup>114</sup> As Sarah emphasized, it has become increasingly clear "how important it is to learn from South Africa but not in the romantic way that we see it."<sup>115</sup>

Multiple people I spoke to expressed concern about what the bleak realities in South Africa would mean for Palestinians, especially given the history of comparisons between the two contexts. As Sarah captured: "I think for Palestinians, it's devastating when they see South Africa or find out about South Africa. They really are broken when they see it – because it has always been what they're looking up to."<sup>116</sup> Earlier in this chapter, I recalled how Amnesty spokesperson Saleh Hijazi was asked about his opinion on present-day realities for South Africans. In response to this question, Hijazi, a Palestinian from East-Jerusalem, expressed his own devastation:

I'm new to South Africa, this is my first visit. I have to say I'm shocked to my core. I've read, we talk in Palestine about the success of bringing down apartheid in South Africa and the importance of international solidarity, but I think everybody who does that needs a visit here to be able to understand fully [what is happening].<sup>117</sup>

In the comparison to Palestine, South Africa starts to function not as the example of road to liberation, but rather, as a warning of which way not to go. These comparisons can be seen as

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<sup>112</sup> Digital interview with William Shoki from Johannesburg, South Africa by author, 28 February 2022.

<sup>113</sup> Digital interview with Salim Vally from Johannesburg, South Africa by author, 18 January 2022.

<sup>114</sup> Digital interview with Sarah [pseudonym] from Johannesburg, South Africa by author, 20 January 2022.

<sup>115</sup> Ibid.

<sup>116</sup> Ibid.

<sup>117</sup> Saleh Hijazi during an event organized by the Palestine Solidarity Campaign by author, 18 February 2022.

catastrophic in that they establish a relationship between both contexts on different terms. When I talked to Martin, an organizer from a Colored community in the Cape Town area, he conveyed how the comparison with South Africa as a warning sign provided an important factor for his involvement in Palestine organizing. As he shared:

the other big thing [motivating me] is of course being able to live in a period, the so-called post-apartheid democratic era, and seeing the outcomes of that. The outcomes of betrayal. And part of my motivation is to provide support, but also to lend some of our direct experience to the Palestinians, so that they don't make the same errors, or are misguided or mislead the way we were in South Africa. So that's also a motive for me to be part of the solidarity movement for Palestine. Because if at any point they do achieve liberation, to end up with what we have in South Africa would be a complete historical disaster, which I don't think the Palestinians should go through as well.<sup>118</sup>

One of these experiences that could be conveyed to lend support, according to Salim, is that of the negotiated settlement that laid the basis for the post-1994 state of South Africa. Through this settlement, the ANC “made major concessions to win the support of white South Africans, international financial institutions, and the global capitalist elite.”<sup>119</sup> As Salim said: “The Oslo accords bequeathed a particular framework, and that framework will perpetuate the issues that Palestinians have and does nothing to address issues of inequality. If that framework is accepted, like we accepted a negotiated settlement, their problems continue.”<sup>120</sup> Rather than contrasting South Africa's success with Palestine's failure, Salim underlines how both contexts are being shaped by deepening inequality, which can become built into the structural foundations of a “liberated” state. The final section takes a closer look at comparisons of the present-day realities in South Africa and Palestine, and how these comparisons reveal and (re)draw political relationships.

## 5. From Ruins to Ruination: Reciprocal Comparisons

After seeing how South African realities in the ruins of apartheid become positioned as a warning sign for Palestine, this section focuses on the wider relations between the two contexts. As we have seen, comparisons that posit South Africa as a warning sign for Palestinians shine a sobering light on the trajectory of South Africa after the end of formal apartheid. They show that despite South Africa's formal post-apartheid freedoms, present-day realities of apartheid can still be taken as comparable to the occupation of Palestine. This final section, however, goes beyond seeing post-apartheid realities in South Africa as a warning sign for Palestine, by understanding both contexts within the wider relations out of which they emerge. I thus explore how present-day South Africa and Palestine can be understood comparatively through these wider relations.

Throughout this chapter so far, we have gotten acquainted with South Africans who relate to Palestine through comparisons with their own experiences, whether of suffering the hardships of apartheid, resisting apartheid, benefiting from apartheid, or continued struggles in the ruins of apartheid. Yet, across these comparisons, as Professor Noor Nieftagodien remarked: “There is the assumption that other people, including Palestinians, have more to learn from our struggle than we from their struggle.”<sup>121</sup> He continued: “the comparison of apartheid, South

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<sup>118</sup> Digital interview with Martin Jansen from Cape Town, South Africa by author, 30 November 2021.

<sup>119</sup> Clarno, *Neoliberal Apartheid*, 32.

<sup>120</sup> Digital interview with Salim Vally from Johannesburg, South Africa by author, 18 January 2022.

<sup>121</sup> Conversation between Noor Nieftagodien and author in Johannesburg, South Africa, 25 February 2022.

African apartheid and apartheid Israel, for most South Africans means that Palestinians can learn from us.”<sup>122</sup> While comparisons with Palestine come out of the history of South African apartheid and the anti-apartheid struggle, it is perhaps also this history that limits the crafting of more reciprocal modes of comparability. After all, Noor explained, “because [the South African] struggle was so prominent in the global imagination, many people in South Africa did not do the hard work of international solidarity *from* South Africa.”<sup>123</sup> “Of course,” he acknowledged, “Palestine is almost the exception, because it is one of those struggles that has been supported consistently.”<sup>124</sup> Still, even in comparisons with Palestine, the South African experience looms large.

The prominence of the South African trajectory in the comparative imagination means that Palestinian experiences are not always heard. As activist and civil servant Parvin explained: “The isolation and the boycott and the success of it meant that [South Africa] was very closed off ... people looked inwards a lot. And that can translate into exceptionalism where we think ‘oh we know everything, and we know better than everyone.’”<sup>125</sup> For this reason, Noor said, “I would assert that there have been very little lessons drawn from what is going on in Palestine for South Africans struggles.”<sup>126</sup> For instance, Noor suggested, the experience of the Palestinian Authority (PA) could have been instructive in showing South Africans that the interests of leaders “are not always the same as the interests of the majority of the people.”<sup>127</sup> As he continued:

South Africans have had to go through that process much longer than Palestinians have for a host of reasons ... I’m not suggesting that anyone could have had foresight about this 20 years ago, but Palestinians have developed a critique of the Palestinian Authority much earlier and more sharply than South Africans in general have developed a critique of the ANC.<sup>128</sup>

While my interlocutors reflected on the continued allegiance to the ANC despite the widespread issues of corruption and nepotism, the comparison with the PA sharpens this view by showing a similar case of an organization monopolizing the national liberation struggle. As analyses of the Palestinian Liberation Organization and the establishment of the Palestinian Authority show, such an organization can monopolize the will of the people and morph into an authoritarian body after having attained power.<sup>129</sup> While this is already being studied in the South African context, reciprocal comparisons with Palestine would aid South Africans in sharpening their critique of and alternatives to their current predicament.<sup>130</sup>

In recent years, reciprocal comparisons between these present-day realities have started to emerge from South Africa, which catastrophically shift the relationship between both contexts once again. These comparisons are made outside traditional realms of support for Palestine, through social movements that challenge established political networks and stand up for the most marginalized in South African society. One such movement, Abahlali baseMjondolo (AbM), or

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<sup>122</sup> Ibid.

<sup>123</sup> Ibid.

<sup>124</sup> Ibid.

<sup>125</sup> Digital interview with Parvin [pseudonym] from Johannesburg, South Africa by author, 20 January 2022.

<sup>126</sup> Conversation between Noor Nieftagodien and author in Johannesburg, South Africa, 25 February 2022.

<sup>127</sup> Ibid.

<sup>128</sup> Ibid.

<sup>129</sup> Raja Khalidi and Sobhi Samour, “Neoliberalism as liberation: The statehood program and the remaking of the Palestinian national movement,” *Journal of Palestine studies* 40, no. 2 (2011): 6-25; Dana El Kurd, *Polarized and demobilized: Legacies of authoritarianism in Palestine* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019); and Alaa Tartir, “Securitized development and Palestinian authoritarianism under Fayyadism,” *Conflict, security & development* 15, no. 5 (2015): 479-502.

<sup>130</sup> E.g., Susan Booysen, *The African National Congress and the regeneration of political power* (Johannesburg: Wits University Press, 2011); Roger Southall, *Liberation movements in power: Party & state in Southern Africa* (London: James Currey, 2013).

the Shack Dwellers' Movement, has incorporated comparisons to Palestine and solidarity with the BDS movement within a broader critique of the ANC leadership and wider global relations that entrench and deepen South African inequality. As one such statement from 2021 reads:

As poor Black people in South Africa today, our homes continue to be violently destroyed, we continue to be governed with armed force, often militarised force, and we continue to be attacked with state violence, arrested on trumped up charges and assassinated. ... Because of our past and our present, we have a deep sense of solidarity for the Palestinian people who continue to suffer under an extremely brutal colonial occupation. We know what it means to live not knowing whether your home and that of your children will be destroyed. We know what it means to live without the protection of the law, and under a state that considers you outside of the law. We know what it means to have innocent people in jail, people whose only crime was to stand up for justice.<sup>131</sup>

Comparisons such as these, made by Abahlali baseMjondolo, demonstrate the continuation of apartheid into the present, and expose the present-day comparability with Palestinian experiences of dispossession and marginalization.

These reciprocal comparisons underline the comparative analysis by Andy Clarno that just as Black South Africans are pushed into zones of invisibility and inaudibility, far removed from any vision of a 'new South Africa,' so are Palestinians increasingly relegated to "zones of abandonment."<sup>132</sup> The Israeli occupation strategy has "separated the West Bank from the Gaza Strip, bifurcated the West Bank into northern and southern regions, and fragmented each region into an archipelago of isolated enclaves," a separation that was formalized through the Oslo Accords.<sup>133</sup> Building on the supposed 'economic peace' of Oslo, recent years have seen more attempts to integrate Palestine into the global economy. These economic relations have benefitted Palestinian elites, but exacerbated inequality and increased the precariousness of the Palestinian working classes. Like the townships and informal shacks of South Africa, Palestinian enclaves have become sites of concentrated inequality, where surplus populations exist at the margins of global capitalism.<sup>134</sup> At the same time, more "occupation ruins" such as roadblocks, settler highways, and the separation wall are built, further entrenching Israel's "destruction enterprise."<sup>135</sup>

Reciprocal comparisons have not only shown the present-day comparability with Palestinian experiences of occupation but have also started to lay bare the concrete relations out of which these experiences emerge. This was done most prominently by a group of some 5,000 South African dairy factory workers who went on strike in 2021. When the South African dairy company Clover was taken over by Milco, a consortium led by the Israeli Central Bottling Company (CBC), the workers went on strike to protest not only the factory closures, job losses, and unfair labor practices taking place after the takeover, but also the fact that this was an Israeli

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<sup>131</sup> *Housing and Land Rights Network*, "Abahlali baseMjondolo Palestine Solidarity," 24 April 2021, <http://hlrn.org/activitydetails.php?title=Abahlali-baseMjondolo-Palestine-Solidarity&id=p2llaQ==#.YozsVZNBz0s>.

<sup>132</sup> Clarno, *Neoliberal Apartheid*.

<sup>133</sup> *Ibid.*, 96.

<sup>134</sup> For more on this, see Toufic Haddad, *Palestine Ltd.: Neoliberalism and nationalism in the occupied territory* (New York: I.B. Tauris, 2016); Kareem Rabie, *Palestine Is Throwing a Party and the Whole World Is Invited: Capital and State Building in the West Bank* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2021).

<sup>135</sup> Anne Meneley, "Hope in the ruins: Seeds, plants, and possibilities of regeneration," *Environment and Planning E: Nature and Space* 4, no. 1 (2021): 158-172; Ariella Azoulay, "When a Demolished House Becomes a Public Square," in *Imperial Debris: On Ruins and Ruination*, ed. Ann Laura Stoler (Durham: Duke University Press, 2013), 194-224.

company.<sup>136</sup> Workers argued that the closure of Clover factories in South Africa would pave the way for the import of dairy products manufactured in Occupied Palestine, for instance in industrial settlements such as Atarot where the CBC operates. The workers rejected the takeover on comparative grounds: “The oppressed people of Palestine are us and we are them”, said General Industries Workers Union of South Africa president and Clover strike spokesperson Mametlwe Sebei.<sup>137</sup> The conditions of Palestinians in places like Atarot; the dispossession, the precarity, and even exposure to toxic pollutants by industrial companies such as the CBC, were said to resemble the condition of the Clover workers, and the Black poor in South Africa more broadly.<sup>138</sup>

Reciprocal comparisons show how comparable experiences in South Africa and Palestine emerge out of broader relations of race and capital, which have not been undone since the end of formal apartheid in South Africa. As activist and professor Salim Vally underlined:

Post 1994, we’ve been vindicated. Vindicated in the sense that many of us believed that the struggle was not just against apartheid. Apartheid was in a sense the scaffolding, while the building of inequality was being constructed. All the laws were linked to the system of capitalism. These days we call it the system of racial capitalism.<sup>139</sup>

Salim suggests that apartheid, rather than an isolated occurrence, can be understood as a particular manifestation of racial capitalism. While the specific political form of apartheid has been abolished in South Africa, its underlying global relations, and ruinous realities, remain.

While previous sections considered how Palestinian experiences resonated with South Africans through the present-day ruins of apartheid, these reciprocal comparisons reveal that the ruination of South Africa, like that of Palestine, is in fact ongoing. As Ann Laura Stoler captures: “ruination is more than a process that sloughs of debris as a by-product.”<sup>140</sup> Instead, it is “a *political project* that lays waste to certain peoples, relations, and things that accumulate in specific places.”<sup>141</sup> Achille Mbembe has argued that in present-day South Africa, there is a need to consider “the human itself as a waste product at the interface of race and capitalism.”<sup>142</sup> Today, this logic of waste “is particularly dramatized by the dilemmas of unemployment and disposability, survival and subsistence, and the expansion in every arena of everyday life of spaces of vulnerability.”<sup>143</sup> This is most obvious in the urban shack settlements out of which Abahlali baseMjondolo emerges, which are largely unconnected to electricity and sanitation. Here, processes of ruination can be lethal, with chemical waste contaminating residential areas and a lack of adequate toilets and waste collection leading to cholera outbreaks.<sup>144</sup> Yet, they also apply to the Black working poor, such as the Clover factory workers.

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<sup>136</sup> Scott Cooper, “South Africa’s Striking Clover Workers: Defending Jobs and Wages, Fighting Israeli Capital, Building Solidarity with Palestine,” *Left Voice*, 1 February 2022, <https://www.leftvoice.org/south-africas-striking-clover-workers-defending-jobs-and-wages-fighting-israeli-capital-building-solidarity-with-palestine/>.

<sup>137</sup> William Shoki, “Israel and the geopolitics of a South African dairy strike,” *Africa is a Country*, February 2022, <https://africasacountry.com/2022/02/south-africas-clover-strike-and-israels-au-campaign>.

<sup>138</sup> The industrial zone of Atarot is built on illegally seized Palestinian land. Palestinians who retained land in Atarot are now surrounded by Israeli factories which “operate up to 24 hours a day, consistently emitting various forms of toxic pollutants into the air” according to *Al-Haq*, “Atarot Settlement: The Industrial Key in Israel’s Plan to Permanently Erase Palestine,” 2 June 2020, <https://www.alhaq.org/publications/16929.html>.

<sup>139</sup> Digital interview with Salim Vally from Johannesburg, South Africa by author, 18 January 2022.

<sup>140</sup> Stoler, *Imperial debris*, 11.

<sup>141</sup> *Ibid.*, 11.

<sup>142</sup> Achille Mbembe, “Democracy as a Community of Life,” in *The humanist imperative in South Africa*, ed. John W de Gruchy (Stellenbosch: African Sun Media), 190.

<sup>143</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>144</sup> Clarno, *Neoliberal Apartheid*, 68.

Yet, for those deeply embedded in the movement for Palestine in South Africa, making such reciprocal comparisons is not always easy, because it may require confronting the realities facing the Black poor in South Africa today. “I had an interesting interaction this week with the [Economic Freedom Fighters] on campus,” said Humairaa when I spoke to her.<sup>145</sup> “They said: These BDS comrades are very selfish. They only care about themselves. They want us to come for the Palestine marches but then when Black students are facing struggles, they are not there. And it’s true.”<sup>146</sup> While most supporters of the Palestinian struggle for liberation would emphasize that the treatment of Palestinians by Israel is akin to the treatment of Black people by the South African Apartheid government, they would not always be willing to draw the connection with the Black poor in the present. This frustrated Humairaa:

When Palestinians protest, then it’s like: ‘oh wow, but they’re standing up for their homeland.’ But then when Black people in South Africa protest it’s like: ‘ugh, why are they doing this again? Their strike is on my way to work and it’s getting in my way.’ How blind can you be to not see the similarities between what is going on?<sup>147</sup>

She also shared that while her own parents are supportive of her work for Palestine, they would question her involvement in what are seen issues facing the Black poor in South Africa:

My parents would not outright say it, but they’ll likely be like: will you be safe? Will it be okay? Are you sure you want to go? Are you sure you want to be involved with this political party? The only reason they’re saying it is because it’s majority Black people. They’ll be as discreet as possible so that they don’t come across as overtly problematic. ... They’ll be like: Go fight for Palestine, don’t fight for workers’ issues!<sup>148</sup>

When I spoke to South Africans about inequality, I found that it was easier to speak of “economic apartheid” than “racial capitalism.” Partly, that may have to do with the fact that the former resonates more easily with established political vocabularies in South Africa. Yet, I also gauged that the term “economic apartheid” might be interpreted as more benign. In “economic apartheid”, inequality can be presented as legacy of the past, whereas in “racial capitalism”, it is the result of an active process of racially organized dispossession and marginalization taking place in the present. For those who have now risen in the ranks of South African society, considering South Africa and Palestine through comparisons of racial capitalism might be uncomfortable. Just like Afrikaans woman Marthie, who reconsidered her own role in apartheid through comparison to Palestine, comparisons of the supposedly post-apartheid era could require looking at the self in a different light. In this sense, these comparisons would be catastrophic, in that they challenge people’s deeply held beliefs about the self and the world.

Yet, this is exactly what is needed, according to voices in the South African BDS coalition. One of these voices, young Black organizer William, stated in the beginning of the chapter that he was hesitant to join the movement for Palestine because it is often portrayed as a Muslim issue. Yet, as we can now understand, the roots of his hesitation lied also in what he called his “weariness about the lack of solidarity that’s expressed for other issues in South Africa,

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<sup>145</sup> The Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF) is a political party campaigning for radical change which often takes up issues affecting the Black majority in South Africa. Yet, many of the interviewees I spoke to emphasized that they did not consider the EFF a credible alternative to ANC rule due to their involvement in corruption scandals.

<sup>146</sup> Interview with Humairaa Mayet in Johannesburg, South Africa by author, 25 February 2022.

<sup>147</sup> Ibid.

<sup>148</sup> Ibid.

ones primarily affecting the Black majority.”<sup>149</sup> When William did decide to get involved, he decided to challenge these issues through the BDS coalition. As he argued:

This country is fucked, for a lack of a better word. There’s no political force, I think, that can present an alternative, unless that political force is grounded in the working-class issues of the majority, because those are the people that are suffering. And so, what it takes [to change South Africa] is for that political force to emerge, and once it does, then it has the ability to also influence the future of Palestinian solidarity, because Palestinian solidarity has no future in this country unless it’s grounded in working class politics.<sup>150</sup>

By co-organizing demonstrations and events with Abahlali baseMjondolo and the Clover strikers, the South African BDS coalition is increasingly breaking away from the established networks that dominate the post-apartheid South African political landscape. Through this alliance, they have come to argue that the buy-out of Clover by Milco is a “microcosm of the disastrous impact apartheid Israel has had in Africa.”<sup>151</sup> “Israel’s intervention in Africa has mainly manifested itself in arms and security deals,” including to the South African apartheid government, as we saw in the first section of this chapter. Yet “on top of that,” in this supposedly post-apartheid era, “the profits Israeli companies make by exploiting workers and farmers across Africa, including in South Africa, go to fuel Israel’s apartheid economy.”<sup>152</sup>

These comparative initiatives are catastrophic in that they expose concrete linkages between the ruination of Palestinian and South African livelihoods, whilst creatively constructing spaces for connected struggle. Tensions remain, as young organizer Sarah wondered: “To what extent are we using Clover to push for Palestine rather than making solidarity meaningful?”<sup>153</sup> While the terms of comparisons between South Africa and Palestine will likely further shift and transform, more so than ever, they invoke the comparability of experiences of ruination in the present. It is in this sense that they compel a revisiting of the ruins of apartheid. Rather than seeing these ruins as relics of the past, they become alive and encroaching, as threats to the lives of those at the margins, but also as visible targets for organizing, whether in South Africa, Palestine, and anywhere in-between.

## Conclusion

In terms of translating political experiences, this chapter described how realities in Palestine resonate with memories held primarily by Black people who lived through the apartheid era, but also by people of Colored or Indian ancestry. By speaking to people about their own and their ancestors’ experiences, this chapter analyzed the resonance of lived experiences of dispossession, segregation, and the denial of rights in Palestine and South Africa. Yet, these experiences of apartheid were not translated evenly. Indeed, comparisons of the apartheid era were contested and undermined through people’s religious connections to Israel, the rejection by those who had benefited from apartheid, and the charge that they did not translate the lived experiences of younger South Africans.

In terms of drawing political relationships, this chapter discussed how the crafting of comparability between the Israeli and South African systems of apartheid gave rise to the BDS

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<sup>149</sup> Digital interview with William Shoki from Johannesburg, South Africa by author, 28 February 2022.

<sup>150</sup> Ibid.

<sup>151</sup> *South Africa BDS Coalition*, “SA BDS Coalition supports striking Clover workers, calls to expel apartheid Israel from South Africa,” 19 January 2022, <https://sabdscollection88687922.wordpress.com/2022/01/19/19-january-2022/>.

<sup>152</sup> Ibid.

<sup>153</sup> Digital interview with Sarah [pseudonym] from Johannesburg, South Africa by author, 20 January 2022.

movement, and how the BDS movement became widely supported in South Africa, including by the post-apartheid ANC government. The BDS movement strengthened comparisons that posited South Africa's trajectory as an example for the Palestinian road to liberation. Yet, this chapter also showed that support for Palestine in South Africa became deeply embedded in the political networks of the post-apartheid era. Consequently, organizers for Palestine in South Africa felt reluctant to criticize the ANC government, despite the widespread corruption and nepotism. Reinforcing these relationships, comparisons with Palestine often remained limited to South Africa in the formal apartheid era and tended to celebrate South Africa's present-day political freedom and leadership.

This chapter showed that in recent years, different modes of resonance with Palestine have emerged. Palestinian experiences of dispossession and marginalization have become positioned as comparable to South African realities in the supposedly post-apartheid era. While inequality, unemployment, and corruption experienced by people today got lost in comparisons of the formal apartheid systems, new modes of comparison evoke these experiences to establish a renewed comparability. Through comparison, South Africa becomes positioned as a warning sign to Palestinians, as a harbinger of what may be to come if the economic structures of inequality are left unchallenged in the wake of liberation. While these comparisons, like earlier comparisons of South Africa as an example, retain their focus on what Palestinians could learn from the South African experience, more reciprocal comparisons are also emerging. Those reciprocal comparisons translate experiences at the margins of both South African and Palestinian society in more even terms and illuminate how and where these experiences intersect.

Finally, this chapter focused on how reciprocal comparisons redraw political relationships. It discussed how reciprocal comparisons lie at the basis of emergent forms of grassroots organizing that connect the dispossession and marginalization of Palestinians to the realities of the Black poor in South Africa. I argued that these modes of organizing shine a different light on the comparability of instances of apartheid, and the wider political relationships out of which they emerge. Rather than positing South African apartheid as a relic of the past, these forms of organizing make visible and debatable the relations of race and capital that continue to deepen the cracks in South African society. At the same time, organizers also reveal how these relations connect South Africa to Palestine, and how to contest exploitative relations in concrete ways. Through these examples, this chapter revisited the ruins of apartheid, underlining the legacy and continuation of ruination today.



# Chapter 6 – From Turtle Island to Palestine: Comparative Indigenities

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The day I arrived at Standing Rock it was Labor Day Weekend. I got there on a Saturday and Monday was Labor Day. It was a holiday. And so, they had called a ceremony up the road from where the camp was, and we were marching up the main highway. It was on the Westside of the Missouri, you know? And there they had put up a big sign that said: ‘Welcome to the West Bank!’ ... They had identified various sacred sites right where the energy transfer partners wanted to build the [Dakota Access] pipeline, where it crossed the highway. And an archeologist had confirmed the sacred sites had been burial sites. So that same day, we’re on the highway a third of a mile from where [the archeologist] identified the sites, and we go to the ceremony and they’re singing. Then, we were about to walk back to camp when they said: ‘wait a minute, they got bulldozers up ahead!’ So, we walk up the road and they’re bulldozing the sacred sites. And I thought: well, this is very much like Palestine.<sup>1</sup>

## Introduction

Recent years have seen the rise of Indigenous comparisons to Palestine. While connections between the plight of Palestinians and that of Indigenous peoples elsewhere are not necessarily new, they are increasingly mobilized in explicitly comparative terms, drawing connections between the experiences of settler colonialism. This chapter focuses on comparisons emerging from Turtle Island, which is a name for North America used by Indigenous organizers and their allies. While Indigenous activism is growing internationally, it is from Turtle Island that most comparisons with Palestine emerge. Communities in Turtle Island have started identifying Palestinians as their Indigenous “siblings” or “relatives,” given that, in their words, Palestinians “struggle for liberation from the same violence that threatens to erase *our* histories and *our* futures.”<sup>2</sup> As I show in this chapter, rather than a straightforward story, comparisons between Turtle Island and Palestine question and transform what it means to be Indigenous.

In Turtle Island, Indigeneity is a term attributed to descendants of people living on the land prior to the arrival of Europeans colonizers from 1492 onwards.<sup>3</sup> At the time of initial contact, these Indigenous people usually lived in societies organized as autonomous nations.<sup>4</sup> From the early sixteenth century, despite their varied encounters with European colonization, most indigenous societies experienced rapid population decline because of violence and disease.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Interview with Jeffrey Haas in Santa Fe, New Mexico by author, 23 March 2022.

<sup>2</sup> Nick Estes, “The Liberation of Palestine Represents an alternative Path for Native Nations,” *The Red Nation*, 7 September 2019, <http://therednation.org/the-liberation-of-palestine-represents-an-alternative-path-for-native-nations/>; Ghassan Kanafani, “Position Paper: The Right of Return is Landback,” *NDN Collective*, March 2022, <https://ndncollective.org/right-of-return-is-landback/>.

<sup>3</sup> In Turtle Island, “indigenous people” serves as an umbrella term for Native Americans, Native Hawaiians, First Nations, Métis, Inuit, and others.

<sup>4</sup> There were strong regional distinctions between these societies. They are often grouped together according to nine culture areas: the Arctic, Subarctic, Northwest Coast, California, Plateau, Great Basin, Southwest, Great Plains, Southeast, and Eastern Woodlands regions. These regions were invaded at different times by different powers: most importantly the British, French, and Spanish empires.

<sup>5</sup> Europeans brought infectious diseases to the Americas, which caused harm and death in many Indigenous societies, yet imperial warfare and genocide were equally significant in the decimation of Indigenous populations, according to Robert Boyd and Robert Thomas Boyd, *The coming of the spirit of pestilence: introduced infectious diseases and population decline among Northwest Coast Indians, 1774-1874* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1999); Catherine M. Cameron, Paul Kelton, and Alan C. Swedlund, eds., *Beyond Germs: Native Depopulation in North America* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2015); Noble David Cook, *Born to die: disease and New World conquest, 1492-1650* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998); Paul Kelton, *Cherokee Medicine, Colonial Germs: An Indigenous Nation's Fight against Smallpox, 1518-1824* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2015); Maureen Katherine Lux, *Medicine that walks: Disease, medicine and Canadian Plains Native people, 1880-1940* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2001).

Colonizers destroyed Indigenous societies across Turtle Island throughout the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, leading to land cession and dispossession.<sup>6</sup> When the term “genocide” was coined in the twentieth century to describe the intentional destruction of a particular group, the destruction of Native societies became included under this rubric.<sup>7</sup> Genocide is then understood more as an uneven process than as a completed outcome, in that most Indigenous groups in Turtle Island were not destroyed entirely, but experienced destruction “in part.”<sup>8</sup>

Some Indigenous nations maintained their sovereignty and established strategic alliances, sometimes by forming treaties with European powers.<sup>9</sup> Over time, settler presence grew, leading to the establishment of settler colonial states: The United States (US), Mexico, and Canada. These settler states enforced unfavorable treaties with Indigenous nations and violated earlier agreements.<sup>10</sup> In 1830, the Indian Removal Act was signed into law in the US, which laid the basis for the forced relocation of Native communities. This forced relocation has become identified specifically as ethnic cleansing, “a term reflective of forced dislocation with the intent to take away lands of a particular ethnic, religious, or cultural group.”<sup>11</sup> This paved the way for the reservation era, in which the Indigenous land-base was rapidly reduced.<sup>12</sup> The *longue durée* of destruction continued through settler massacres.<sup>13</sup> While Indigenous people continue to fight for self-determination today, they still face discrimination and police violence, have limited autonomy, and often live on undesirable land with restricted opportunities.

As we will see in this chapter, the meaning of Indigeneity is sometimes seen as tied to connotations of failure, due to the destruction of Indigenous sovereignty in and beyond Turtle Island. On the basis of these connotations, comparisons between Turtle Island and Palestine have become contested, through critiques of the bleak future they may portray for Palestinians. Yet, the emergence of comparative connections with Palestine is deeply connected to the resurgence of Indigenous resistance in Turtle Island in recent years. Building on centuries of Native history, which was often silenced but is increasingly resurfacing, recent episodes of protest refuse the normalization of settler colonial states. Through comparison to Palestine, organizers challenge the notion that Indigenous sovereignty in Turtle Island is already lost, and rather present both the Palestinian and the Indigenous struggles as actively ongoing. It is by underlining this ongoingness that comparisons work to strengthen the refusal of settler realities.

This chapter examines the crafting of comparability by interrogating how and why Indigenous and non-Indigenous activists in Turtle Island compare their own situation to that of Palestinians. In order to intimately understand the realities of Indigenous communities, I adhere

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<sup>6</sup> Alexander Laban Hinton, Andrew Woolford, and Jeff Benvenuto, eds., *Colonial genocide in indigenous North America* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2014).

<sup>7</sup> Benjamin Madley, *An American Genocide: The United States and the California Indian Catastrophe, 1846-1873* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2016), 5.

<sup>8</sup> Andrew Woolford, *This benevolent experiment: Indigenous boarding schools, genocide, and redress in Canada and the United States* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2015), 5, 8.

<sup>9</sup> Pekka Hämäläinen, *Comanche Empire* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008); Pekka Hämäläinen, *Lakota America: A New History of Indigenous Power* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2019); Karina Walters, “Strategic Alliances and Trail of Broken Treaties,” *Native Philanthropy*, accessed 15 November 2022, <https://nativephilanthropy.candid.org/timeline/era/strategic-alliances-and-trail-of-broken-treaties/>.

<sup>10</sup> Karina Walters, “Sovereign Nation Era Ends,” *Native Philanthropy*, accessed 15 November 2022, <https://nativephilanthropy.candid.org/timeline/era/sovereign-nation-era-ends/>.

<sup>11</sup> Gary Clayton Anderson, “The Native Peoples of the American West: Genocide or Ethnic Cleansing?” *The Western Historical Quarterly* 47, no. 4 (2016): 409.

<sup>12</sup> Robert J. Miller, *Reservation "Capitalism": Economic Development in Indian Country* (Westport: ABC-CLIO, 2012); Mark David Spence, *Dispossessing the wilderness: Indian removal and the making of the national parks* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999).

<sup>13</sup> E.g., Alex Alvarez, *Native America and the question of genocide* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2014); Brendan C. Lindsay, *Murder state: California's native American genocide, 1846-1873* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2012); Madley, *An American Genocide*.

to language commonly used by these communities and their allies. In this chapter, this means that I use the Indigenous term “Turtle Island” rather than “North America.” This term comes from a variety of oral histories told by Algonquian and Iroquoian-speaking peoples in the northeast of the island.<sup>14</sup> These creation stories differ across communities, but they share the belief that the planet used to be covered in water, until soil from the bottom of the ocean was placed on the back of a turtle. In many traditions, the soil was placed on the back of the turtle by various animals who came together to save a woman who fell from the sky from falling into the water. The land grew and grew, and this is how Sky Woman, along with all the other animals, formed what became known as Turtle Island.<sup>15</sup> In the 1970s, the term Turtle Island became adopted more widely by Indigenous and environmental activists to contest the use of settler colonial terminology.<sup>16</sup> The term is intended to shift perceptions of the continent by disrupting its accepted political geography, and to bring into view the long history of indigenous presence, which continues into the era of settler colonization.

When I use the terms “United States”, “Canada” or “Mexico” in this chapter, I refer to the national projects contested by these Indigenous communities. This means that I also evoke the wider settler colonial histories out of which these national projects emerge, and the settler colonial governments, both past and present, that have asserted their authority.<sup>17</sup> Interviewees will often say the “*so called* United States” to contest the authority of settler colonial rule and emphasize Indigenous sovereignty. In this chapter, I speak of “Indigenous” or “Native” people to refer to the descendants of those who lived on the land prior to the arrival of European settlers from the fifteenth century onwards. I capitalize these terms to recognize their significance as situated identifiers, referring to concrete historical and political communities, rather than more general adjectives.<sup>18</sup> Interviewees will also refer to “(original) stewards”, “First Nations,” “Native Americans,” or “American Indians.” While this analysis is primarily grounded in the realities of the Navajo (or Diné) and Pueblo peoples of New Mexico, my interlocutors consider themselves part of the wider struggle for Indigenous determination in Turtle Island. I thus situate the specificities of these communities within wider Indigenous relations.

In this chapter, I do use regional placenames, such as the state of “New Mexico” or the city of “Albuquerque.” These regional names, of course, emerge out of the same histories of settler colonialism as national signifiers such as “United States” or “Mexico.” In using these terms, I follow my interlocutors who deploy them to describe their daily realities. While they will often emphasize that a city such as Albuquerque is in fact situated on Indigenous land, Tiwa land more specifically, it proves difficult for them, and also for me, to describe these everyday realities without using any settler colonial signifiers. In many ways, the contradictions inherent in these naming practices betray how Indigenous communities have become entangled, in various ways, with the ideas and practices of the settler colonial state. In this chapter, I therefore do not wish to portray any sense of Indigenous authenticity or purity. What I wish to explore, appreciate, and

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<sup>14</sup> Robert J. Pearce, “Turtles from Turtle Island: An Archaeological Perspective from Iroquoia,” *Ontario Archaeology* 79/80 (2005): 88-108.

<sup>15</sup> Robin Kimmerer, *Braiding sweetgrass: Indigenous wisdom, scientific knowledge and the teachings of plants* (Minneapolis: Milkweed Editions, 2013), 3-5.

<sup>16</sup> Gary Snyder, “The Rediscovery of Turtle Island,” in *A Place in Space: Ethics, Aesthetics, and Watersheds*, ed. Gary Snyder (Berkeley: Counterpoint, 1996): 236-251.

<sup>17</sup> While the term “Mexico” is originally an Aztec term referring to the Valley of Mexico and its surrounding territories, the use of the term to refer to what are now the “United Mexican States” is a settler colonial invention that follows the territorial boundaries of the former imperial territory of “New Spain.”

<sup>18</sup> This naming practice follows conventions in Native activism and scholarship.

interrogate instead, is the politics of what it means to be Indigenous, as it emerges through catastrophic comparisons.

The chapter consists of five sections. The first section of this chapter explores how experiences of settler colonialism in Turtle Island and Palestine resonate with one another. Before diving into the crafting of more explicit comparability, this section centers on the subliminal nature of these comparisons. It discusses how resonance is felt by Indigenous people visiting Palestine, but also touches upon the experiences of the Palestinian diaspora in Turtle Island. Finally, it suggests that although the signs of settler colonialism in Turtle Island might sometimes be more covert, it is moments of active resistance through which the comparison to Palestine becomes clearest.

The second section of this chapter centers on these episodes of active resistance. It questions the notion that being Indigenous means being peaceful and non-disruptive and shows how this notion is being overturned. It takes us back to the U.S. and Canadian histories of Indigenous boarding schools, which are a key factor in the undermining of Indigenous resistance movements. It then discusses recent episodes of Native resistance (Idle No More, Standing Rock, and Wet'suwet'en) and shows how, in these moments, comparability with Palestine becomes crafted in more explicit terms.

The third section takes count of the critiques of the comparative relationship between Turtle Island and Palestine. It discusses how Turtle Island is construed as a possible failed or bleak future for Palestine, and how these connotations of failure extend U.S. and Canadian settler narratives that deny Indigenous sovereignty. The section points at alternative ways of construing the comparison through a more active understanding of the resistance in Turtle Island. It underlines the ongoingness of both situations of settler colonialism - and of the struggles to contest the normalization of the settler state.

The fourth section continues the discussion of transformations in the meaning of Indigeneity but approaches it through countervailing Israeli comparisons to and connections with Native people. While this section challenges these developments as instances of “redwashing,” it takes seriously the questions it raises about what it means to be Indigenous or a settler. It shows how Indigeneity and settlerness become debated across Turtle Island, and how their meanings shift in and through comparisons with Palestine.

The fifth and final section of the chapter illuminates how comparisons to Palestine inform acts of refusing the Canadian and U.S settler states. It introduces refusal as a key way of asserting Indigenous sovereignty and discusses what this looks like in practice. It takes a close look at refusals in New Mexico, and more specifically the refusal of its status as a sacrifice zone for both U.S. and Israeli settler colonialism. By refusing the normality of settler colonialism, and by (partly) withdrawing from its reach, Indigenous organizers align themselves with Palestinians. It is ultimately through these comparative connections that a more active and resistant understanding of Indigeneity is put to practice.

## 1. Comparing Corn and Olive Trees: Resonance Between Turtle Island and Palestine

“You will erect your world upon our world”, says Mahmoud Darwish’s protagonist the Red Indian to the White Man.<sup>19</sup> Speaking in the voice of an imagined Native American, Darwish continues to describe the effects of the construction of that new world: “There are dead and settlements, dead and bulldozers, dead and hospitals, dead and radar screens that capture the dead who die more than once in life.” The analogy between the dispossession of the Indigenous population of Turtle Island and the fate of Darwish’s fellow Palestinians is implicitly but undoubtedly there. Without ever mentioning his Native land, this work by Palestine’s most celebrated poet effectively weaves Palestine into the story of Turtle Island, and Turtle Island into the story of Palestine.<sup>20</sup>

In 2012, this poem became used as part of a statement whereby Palestinians expressed solidarity with an Indigenous movement in Turtle Island. The statement spoke of “the deep connections and similarities between the experiences of our peoples.”<sup>21</sup> The Palestinian proclamation of this “common history” not only forged relations with the Indigenous movement, it also built upon and strengthened the notion of the Palestinian struggle as an Indigenous struggle.<sup>22</sup> As we will see in this chapter, the notion that the situation in Palestine can and should be directly compared to that of the Indigenous peoples of Turtle Island in such a way is still emerging. Yet, prior to that, peoples’ experiences in both places had long resonated with one another, as they did in Darwish’s poem. In this section, I discuss these more implicit or subliminal comparisons, which translate political experiences and lay the basis for the more deliberate crafting of comparability in recent years.

I start this story of comparison in New Mexico, one of the places in Turtle Island with the highest number of Indigenous inhabitants today.<sup>23</sup> For me, as someone who has never visited Alaska, Oklahoma, or another state with a large Indigenous population, New Mexico felt markedly different from other places in Turtle Island. Even though many major cities bear the historical traces of Native societies and are still inhabited by Indigenous peoples, I could more easily forget that I was in a settler colony in the streets of New York or San Francisco.<sup>24</sup> In Albuquerque or Santa Fe, there was no way around it. The signs were everywhere, in the Native building styles, the shops, the people in the streets.

Yet, New Mexico’s identity is multilayered through histories of conquest and migration. As Joseph P. Masco explains, “what is now known as ‘New Mexico’ has not only been an indigenous borderland since time immemorial, it has also been the far periphery of the Spanish Empire, the northern edge of Mexico, as well as the southern boundary of the United States. Legacies from each of these nation building projects animate contemporary politics.”<sup>25</sup> As a Taos-based author wrote: “New Mexico [is a] surreal territory suspended between colorful

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<sup>19</sup> Mahmoud Darwish, “The ‘Red Indian’s’ Penultimate Speech to the White Man,” trans. Fady Joudah, *Harvard Review* 36 (2009): 152-159.

<sup>20</sup> Turtle Island is the name for North America used by Native tribes and activists.

<sup>21</sup> *US Palestinian Community Network*, “Palestinians in Solidarity with Idle No More and Indigenous Rights,” 13 December 2012, <https://uspcn.org/2012/12/23/palestinians-in-solidarity-with-idle-no-more-and-Indigenous-rights/>.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>23</sup> As a majority-minority state, New Mexico is also one of the few places with a population made up of less than 50% White people.

<sup>24</sup> For example, Coll Thrush writes about native agency in Seattle’s urban history in *Native Seattle: Histories from the Crossing-Over Place* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2009).

<sup>25</sup> Joseph P. Masco, *The Nuclear Borderlands: The Legacy of the Manhattan Project in Post-Cold War New Mexico*, PhD Thesis, University of California, San Diego, 1999.

yesterdays and frightening tomorrows. For some, it's an inspiration; for others, a castigation. Few states in America are more impoverished...or more magnificent."<sup>26</sup> Known through its marketing slogan as the "Land of Enchantment," when I spoke to locals, they sometimes jokingly call it the "Land of Entrapment": Because life in New Mexico is cheaper than in neighboring states, people either never move out or always come back. This saying seemed painful but at the same time comfortingly honest to me, as if here, finally, the American Dream was being buried under the layers of red desert dust.

Elena, an Indigenous woman living in Santa Fe, visited Palestine long before she became aware of the existence of any explicit comparisons to her own situation in New Mexico. While Elena would later become highly active in Indigenous organizing for Palestinian liberation, her initial visit to Palestine was not motivated by any political purpose at all. Instead, it was driven by love. This was the early 1980s, Elena was seventeen, and she had fallen for a Palestinian.

Compelled by love, she decided to travel with him to his homeland. As she recounted:

We travelled there and I found myself looking around and saying: this looks familiar. Not only does it look familiar, it *feels* familiar. The bulldozing of the olive trees and the women crying and the building of Israeli settlements on occupied land, what we refer to here in Turtle Island as *unceded* land. It was just familiar, and not only that it looked familiar - it looks very much like New Mexico and the deserts of New Mexico – ... but I knew then that it was a similar situation that goes on every day in Indian country.<sup>27</sup>

When I asked her how this visit resonated with her, she continued:

It felt very much like the reservations that I have been on and lived on most of my life. The limited access to material goods. The constant feeling of being watched, being controlled. Access to anything being controlled by an outside entity. ... It's almost like being in a parallel universe when you're on the ground [in Palestine].<sup>28</sup>

By this time, there was not yet any Indigenous organizing for Palestine that Elena was aware of. Elena's father came from one of the Pueblos, Native sedentary communities located mainly in the deserts of New Mexico and Arizona, known for their adobe building structures and well-preserved Indigenous way of life. As an anthropologist, Elena's father also taught in the neighboring Navajo reservation, the largest Indigenous community in Turtle Island, and would bring Elena with him to spend time there as a child. Yet, coming back from Palestine, she found that there was little information about the Israeli occupation among people in these various places. Elena felt "really lost."<sup>29</sup> "There was no one that understood what I was talking about."<sup>30</sup> After the first Gaza war (2008-2009), she decided to start organizing for Palestine and joined a Jewish group, and then another group called Santa Feans for Justice in Palestine. It was only years later, in 2014, that the Red Nation, a collective dedicated to the liberation of Native peoples, including Palestinians, was founded in Albuquerque, New Mexico. To Elena, finding them, "was like coming out of a dark forest and seeing the light and the beauty and the water. Here were people who I didn't need to explain why I was an ally of Palestine. It was, oh of course, how could you not be?"<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> John Nichols as in Linda Durham, *Still Moving* (Santa Fe: Mobius Pathways Press, 2020).

<sup>27</sup> Digital interview with Elena Ortiz from Santa Fe, New Mexico by author, 13 January 2022.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

The Red Nation also organizes trips for Indigenous people to visit Palestine and see the situation with their own eyes. During my time in Albuquerque, I attended events where people would share their experiences of going there. As one young Pueblo woman shared:

Something that always strikes me out here in the United States is the amount of United States flags. I walk into Walmart and there is an aisle where it's just all United States flags hanging down. And I remember feeling the exact same way walking down in Jerusalem where you see the flags of Israel over what used to be Palestinian homes.<sup>32</sup>

She continued by evoking similarities between her ancestors' catastrophic histories and Palestinians' realities: "In Hebron, when we saw everyday Palestinian people being blocked from going to their job or crossing town, that reminds me of Pueblo people, when we couldn't travel between Pueblos on horse."<sup>33</sup> And finally: "The olive trees that were burnt down to suffocate Palestinians make me think of the corn that was burnt down to suffocate my people."<sup>34</sup>

For these Indigenous women, the perceived parallels with Palestine also proved catastrophic in that they allowed them to see their own situation through different eyes. This was especially the case for in the Palestinian diaspora in Turtle Island. One big difference between my fieldwork in Turtle Island and that in Ireland and South Africa, as discussed in the previous chapters, is the number of Palestinians I spoke to. Turtle Island hosts the second largest Palestinian community outside of the Middle East.<sup>35</sup> This means that more so than we have seen in previous chapters, Palestinian voices blended into comparisons emerging *from* Turtle Island. This is not to say that Palestinian voices are not constitutive to the formation and negotiation of comparisons with Ireland and South Africa, as will become clearer in the next chapter, but rather, that the imprint left by the Palestinian diaspora in Turtle Island on these comparative practices is in some ways more intimate. These are people that consider both situations that are brought into comparison, in varying degrees, as their own.

Someone who embodies the blending of both situations is Samia, a second-generation Palestinian-American in her 50s. Samia was born in Detroit, Michigan, one of the cities with the highest concentration of Palestinian-Americans in Turtle Island, yet she grew up in Gallup, a New Mexico town bordering the Navajo reservation. Samia's family, like many Palestinian families at the time, moved to Gallup because of the Indigenous turquoise and silver jewelry trade there, in which Samia's father became involved. Prior to coming to Gallup, Samia had gone to school in Jerusalem - a place to which she would move back several times later in life. The experience of living in Jerusalem meant that Samia, unlike most second-generation Palestinians, had an intimate and embodied knowledge of life under Israeli occupation:

Every time I saw an Indigenous person homeless or unsheltered or drunk, I started to ask questions. And you started to see, you know, how settler colonization impacted communities and separated them from their land and their holdings. The struggles they had, whether it was fighting for the aquifers on reservations, protecting resources, and the living situations of Indigenous people, it spoke to me loud and clear: this is Palestine, this is occupied country.<sup>36</sup>

When I asked Samia which similarities resonated with her most, she replied:

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<sup>32</sup> Event organized by the Southwest Coalition for Palestine (co-sponsored by the Red Nation and other organizations), in Albuquerque, Turtle Island, on 25 March 2022.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

<sup>35</sup> The largest being located in Chile.

<sup>36</sup> Digital interview with Samia Assed living in Albuquerque, New Mexico by author, 28 January 2022.

Every aspect of it: water, land, human rights, living. It was staring right in my face. I knew their living conditions, but there was something I could automatically relate to the situation in Palestine.<sup>37</sup>

Similar to previous chapters, both Samia's and Elena's accounts underline that the situations in Turtle Island and Palestine not only share analytical similarities but also that, to them, they resonate with each other on a more subliminal level too. Just as Elena observed that Palestine did not only look, but *feel* familiar to her, Samia underlines that there is an important element beyond her knowledge of the living conditions of Indigenous people, which is her ability to relate to it in a deeper way through her knowledge of Palestine. Just as the comparison proved catastrophic to Elena, in that it propelled her into action for Palestine, so did it move Samia to start making concrete and actionable Palestinian-Indigenous connections.

While emphasizing the concrete similarities and subliminal resonances, people pointed out the undoubtable differences between both situations too. As Aaron, a young solidarity activist living in Albuquerque noted:

I think one huge difference [between Palestine and Turtle Island] is that if you would walk on the streets here and ask: are we under occupation? A lot of people would think you were nuts. Probably including some Indigenous people. In political circles there would be more awareness of yes: these are similar situations, but I think there is also recognition even among people who are drawing that connection that there's no martial law here. There's no siege. There's no blockade. People are not getting the shit bombed out of them. No one is knocking off the roof and blowing up their houses, you know? It's more subtle.<sup>38</sup>

At the same time, I got the sense that while these more overt signs of settler colonization might be invisible in Turtle Island most of the time, they can and do pop up in critical moments.

As has become clear in recent years, Turtle Island settler states tend not to be so subtle in cases that Indigenous people stand up to protect their land. When a coalition of Palestine solidarity activists from Toronto joined a 2008 protest to protect Native Haudenosaunee land, one participant recounted:

[Canadian troops] came with helicopters equipped with machine guns and snipers hidden in trees. They flooded the site with tear gas and pepper spray. They beat and tasered unarmed Haudenosaunee. [We] stood watching the madness of the Canadian state unleashed. And for those of us who had lived under military occupation in our own home countries one simple thought overwhelmed us: this looks like home.<sup>39</sup>

Similar catastrophic events occurred during other major Indigenous protests, such as the 2016 protests at the Standing Rock reservation. As the opening paragraph conveyed, it is here that Indigenous sites were destroyed by bulldozers, bearing a striking resemblance to the bulldozing of Palestinian properties. Protesters were also met with high levels of police violence. It is precisely in moments like these, when Indigenous resistance in Turtle Island resurges, that the comparative connections with Palestine are forged most explicitly.

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<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

<sup>38</sup> Interview with Aaron [pseudonym] in Albuquerque, New Mexico by author, 27 March 2022.

<sup>39</sup> *Caledonia Victims Project*, "Caledonia Players: Anti-Israel Organizations," 24 March 2011. <https://caledoniavictimsproject.wordpress.com/2011/03/24/anti-israel-organizations/>.



## 2. From Palestine to the Pipeline: The Resurgence of Indigenous Resistance

While we have seen that the situations in Turtle Island and Palestine were experienced as resonant with one another, the crafting of more explicit comparability is dependent upon a number of recent developments. Most importantly, recent years have seen the rise of more disruptive modes of Indigenous resistance, along with an interest in longer histories of Indigenous resistance against settler colonialism and increasing recognition of the role of Indigenous people on the frontline of protests for social and climate justice. As I discuss in this section, these transformations are still ongoing, and have been paving the way for the creation of more explicit comparisons between Turtle Island and Palestine.

For a long time, there was a notion that Indigenous resistance should always be peaceful and non-disruptive. This was also attested to by Jennifer M., a Native woman from San Ildefonso Pueblo in her 20s. A frequent speaker in podcasts and writer of articles, Jennifer was outspoken about the importance of normalizing Indigenous resistance. She herself puts this to practice through her work at the Red Nation, the Indigenous collective established in Albuquerque that Elena referred to earlier, which now operates through chapters across Turtle Island. Yet, Jennifer acknowledged that not everyone would necessarily agree with her approach. “I guess locally it’s considered taboo,” she said, “where some people think that it’s not something that Native people do or should do. It’s too violent, and it makes us look bad.”<sup>40</sup> Yet, it was time, Jennifer said, to overhaul this narrative:

It’s not violent to defend yourself, it’s not violent to defend your land. And it’s something that we’ve always done. There’s always this idea of tradition wielded against us, right? ‘It’s not traditional to protest. It’s not traditional to do XYZ.’ But it actually is very traditional to resist settler colonialism. We’ve been doing it since its inception, you know? And that hasn’t changed. It hasn’t ended. And it won’t end until we’ve had our victory.<sup>41</sup>

This history of Indigenous resistance, Jennifer mentioned, was erased in large part through the Indian residential school systems in the United States and Canada, which sought to educate, civilize, and assimilate Indigenous children into settler culture.<sup>42</sup> These boarding schools for Native children were brought up time and time again by my interlocutors when they spoke about the impacts of settler colonialism on their lives and the lives of their ancestors. The first boarding schools were set up by missionary societies in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, and government-run schools emerged in the nineteenth century.<sup>43</sup> The schools officially operated from the 1880s until the late twentieth century. According to some estimates, by the height of the system, the Canadian residential schools took in one third of Indigenous children, and the United States system as many as 80%.<sup>44</sup>

It is difficult to overestimate the catastrophic impact of the residential school system on Indigenous communities in Turtle Island. Indigenous children were removed from their families, deprived of their cultures and languages, subjected to terrible living conditions, and exposed to mental, physical, and sexual abuse. Children at the Albuquerque Indian School, which was in

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<sup>40</sup> Digital interview with Jennifer Marley from San Ildefonso Pueblo, New Mexico by author, 5 May 2022.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

<sup>42</sup> Woolford, *This benevolent experiment*.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., 2.

<sup>44</sup> *The New York Times*, “Lost Lives, Lost Culture: The Forgotten History of Indigenous Boarding Schools,” 19 July 2021, <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/07/19/us/us-canada-Indigenous-boarding-residential-schools.html>; *National Center for Truth and Reconciliation*, “residential schools overview,” accessed 16 September 2022, <https://web.archive.org/web/20160420012021/http://umanitoba.ca/centres/nctr/overview.html>.

operation from 1881 until 1981, experienced epidemics which debilitated as much as half of the student body at certain times.<sup>45</sup> Many Indigenous children lost their lives while at the school, and in some cases, bodies were not returned to their home communities as officials buried the deceased in a nondescript cemetery on the edge of the campus.<sup>46</sup> In Canada, early twentieth century reports spoke of “[a] trail of disease and death” at boarding schools, and estimated that about half of the children that attended these schools did not survive them.<sup>47</sup> Up until today, unmarked mass graves continue to be unearthed on the sites of former schools.<sup>48</sup>

Therefore, the boarding school system is increasingly positioned as part of the genocide of the Indigenous peoples of Turtle Island.<sup>49</sup> The boarding school system can be considered a part of this process as it severed links between children and their parents and communities, disrupted links of cultural transmission, and enforced cultural assimilation, thereby destroying Indigenous groups “as self-sustaining and self-defining entities.”<sup>50</sup> The legacy of this system is the erasure of Indigenous languages and cultural traditions, as well as the silencing of the histories and practices of Indigenous resistance.<sup>51</sup> It has also led to high level of intergenerational trauma among Indigenous people, and correspondingly high level of substance abuse and social problems.<sup>52</sup>

In recent decades, activists such as Jennifer M. have tried to retrieve the diverse history of Indigenous resistance, including episodes of armed struggle. While this history looks different for communities across Turtle Island, Indigenous people in New Mexico have engaged in organized rebellions and smaller scale acts of resistance throughout history, first to oppose Spanish colonization from the sixteenth century, then to challenge Mexican rule from 1821, and finally against the United States settler colonial project from 1848 onwards.<sup>53</sup> As Jennifer describes:

I guess the big ones that come to mind are the early battles when the Spanish first arrived. And then there was a bunch of small-scattered revolts through the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, which I think resemble the multiple battles that are scattered through various Palestinian cities. I think people forget how recent in history that was for us. The Taos rebellion was in the 1860s. That really wasn't that long ago. Some of our great-grandparents were even alive during that time. ... I think about how those moments are recent in history, yet they're lost on us, and how they were literally about protecting the land.<sup>54</sup>

One of the most important battles for Pueblo people was the Pueblo Revolt of 1680, an uprising of most of the Pueblo people against the Spanish colonizers.<sup>55</sup> A group called the Pueblo Action Alliance (PAA) has recently reclaimed this history, stating that “the Pueblo Revolt never ended.”<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> Exhibition at the Indian Pueblo Cultural Center, Albuquerque.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

<sup>47</sup> John S. Milloy, *A national crime: The Canadian government and the residential school system* (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 2017), 130-131.

<sup>48</sup> *The New York Times*, “Hundreds More Unmarked Graves Found at Former Residential School in Canada,” 30 July 2021, <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/06/24/world/canada/Indigenous-children-graves-saskatchewan-canada.html>.

<sup>49</sup> Hinton, Woolford, and Bevenuto, eds., *Colonial genocide in indigenous North America*; Woolford, *This benevolent experiment*.

<sup>50</sup> Woolford, *This benevolent experiment*, 289.

<sup>51</sup> When and how this happened will hopefully be brought to the fore through emergent indigenous histories.

<sup>52</sup> E.g., Amy Bombay, Kim Matheson, and Hymie Anisman, “Intergenerational trauma: Convergence of multiple processes among First Nations peoples in Canada,” *International Journal of Indigenous Health* 5, no. 3 (2009): 6-47.

<sup>53</sup> From 1750-1850 the Comanche peoples even formed their own empire across New Mexico, Texas and Louisiana, extracting resources and exploiting labor from settlers and other indigenous neighbors, as described by Hämäläinen in *Comanche Empire*.

<sup>54</sup> Digital interview with Jennifer Marley from San Ildefonso Pueblo, New Mexico by author, 5 May 2022.

<sup>55</sup> Andrew L. Knaut, *The Pueblo revolt of 1680: conquest and resistance in seventeenth-century New Mexico* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1997).

<sup>56</sup> *Pueblo Action Alliance*, “The Pueblo Revolt Never Ended,” accessed 16 September 2022, <https://www.puebloactionalliance.org/>.

This renewed interest in the history and practice of Indigenous resistance is not only a phenomenon in the region of New Mexico, but across Turtle Island and other settler-colonial contexts. In Australia and New Zealand, Aboriginal and Māori voices have become central to the reinterpretation of conventional accounts of history, with a particular focus on acts of resistance.<sup>57</sup> Across Latin America, Native histories are continued into the present with the emergence of Indigenous movements against imperialism and extraction, from the Aymara to the Zapatistas.<sup>58</sup> In Greenland, debates about the forced re-education of Indigenous children in Denmark and the possibility of Inuit self-determination have also come to the fore.<sup>59</sup> This movement towards recognition of Indigenous history and agency has been on the rise since the 1970s. In the 1980s and 1990s, Indigenous rights became a central issue in international political arenas, culminating in the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples in 2007.<sup>60</sup> As a result of this status, Indigenous groups have also come to be recognized in places that are not considered settler states, including across the Asian and African continents.<sup>61</sup>

In Turtle Island, the resurgence of Indigenous resistance also started in the late 1960s and 1970s, when the American Indian Movement (AIM) took shape. The AIM addressed issues of police brutality, but also sought recognition for the plight of Indigenous people.<sup>62</sup> It was connected to, but also distinguished itself from, the broader civil rights movement by starting from an Indigenous relational ontology rather than more individual rights-based frameworks.<sup>63</sup> At the same time, the AIM maintained close connections with the broader Non-Aligned Movement, and met with the PLO in the 1970s.<sup>64</sup> The movement also returned to history to position itself not as a radical break in Indigenous organization, but as a continuation, emphasizing that “the movement [already] existed for 500 years without a name.”<sup>65</sup>

Indigenous organizing today builds on this tradition. The AIM faded to the background by the late 1970s due to the imprisonment of its leaders after the 1973 occupation of Wounded Knee.<sup>66</sup> When the tribal president of the South Dakota town remained in power after being impeached for corruption, the AIM seized the town.<sup>67</sup> As the site of the 1890 Wounded Knee massacre, in which the United States Army murdered more than 200 Lakota people, the town was highly significant for the Native resistance movement.<sup>68</sup> In 1973, protests therefore also came to center on the broader failure of the settler state to fulfill treaties with Native people. In recent years, this struggle has been given renewed impetus through the close connections between Indigenous organizers and the Black Lives Matter movement, on the one hand, and the global

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<sup>57</sup> E.g., Conal McCarthy, *Exhibiting Maori: A history of colonial cultures of display* (Oxford: Berg, 2007); Ann McGrath, *Contested ground: Australian Aborigines under the British crown* (London: Routledge, 2020); Lachy Paterson and Angela Wanhalla, *He Reo Wāhine: Māori Women's Voices from the Nineteenth Century* (Auckland: Auckland University Press, 2017); Henry Reynolds, *The other side of the frontier: Aboriginal resistance to the European invasion of Australia* (Sydney: University of New South Wales Press, 2006).

<sup>58</sup> René Harder Horst, *A History of Indigenous Latin America: Aymara to Zapatistas* (London: Routledge, 2020).

<sup>59</sup> Helene Thiesen, *Greenland's Stolen Indigenous Children: A Personal Testimony* (London: Taylor & Francis, 2022).

<sup>60</sup> United Nations, “United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples,” accessed 15 November 2022, [https://www.un.org/development/desa/indigenouspeoples/wp-content/uploads/sites/19/2018/11/UNDRIP\\_E\\_web.pdf](https://www.un.org/development/desa/indigenouspeoples/wp-content/uploads/sites/19/2018/11/UNDRIP_E_web.pdf).

<sup>61</sup> Bengt G. Karlsson, “Anthropology and the ‘Indigenous Slot’ Claims to and Debates about Indigenous Peoples’ Status in India,” *Critique of anthropology* 23, no. 4 (2003): 403-423.

<sup>62</sup> Dennis Banks and Richard Erdoes, *Ojibwa warrior: Dennis Banks and the rise of the American Indian Movement* (Oklahoma: University of Oklahoma Press, 2005).

<sup>63</sup> Ibid.

<sup>64</sup> *American Indian Movement*, “AIM’s international contacts,” accessed 6 October 2022, <https://aimovement.org/peltier/index.html>.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid.

<sup>66</sup> Dee Brown, *Bury my heart at Wounded Knee: An Indian history of the American west* (London: Vintage, 1987).

<sup>67</sup> Ian Record and Anne Pearse Hocker, “A Fire that Burns: The Legacy of Wounded Knee,” *Native Americas* 15, no. 1 (1998): 14.

<sup>68</sup> Jerome A. Greene, *American Carnage: Wounded Knee, 1890* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2014).

environmental movement, on the other. Indigenous and Black organizers are increasingly recognized as leaders in issues of social justice, especially as Indigenous lands become the frontlines of environmental battles against extractive industries.

This reclaiming of Indigenous resistance has also been accompanied by, and shaped through, the crafting of explicit comparisons with Palestine. When I spoke to a Hammam, a Palestinian-Canadian organizer who was part of a delegation of activists who went to the protests to protect Native Haudenosaunee land back in 2008, he confirmed my suspicion that “the conversation about the similarities between Palestine and Turtle Island took place between activists but it was not a widespread conversation, it has grown since then.”<sup>69</sup> Indeed, despite the historical connections between both situations, it has only been in the last decade, through the various episodes of Indigenous organizing of an increasingly large scale across Turtle Island, that direct comparisons with Palestine have grown more and more explicit.

The crafting of comparability with Palestine has taken place most prominently during three moments of contention: The 2012 Idle No More, 2016-2017 Standing Rock, and 2019-2022 Wet’suwet’en protests. Idle No More is a collaborative movement of First Nations, Métis, and Inuit peoples that emerged when the Canadian government introduced a bill that limited the protection of waterways passing through Indigenous land. The Palestinian solidarity statement, issued by 54 organizations and 224 individuals, used Darwish’s poem and described “the deep connections and similarities between the experiences of our peoples.”<sup>70</sup> It also emphasized that “the struggle of Indigenous and Native peoples in Canada, the United States, have long been known to the Palestinian people, reflecting our common history as peoples and nations subject to ethnic cleansing at the hands of the very same forces of European colonization.”<sup>71</sup> The solidarity statement called attention to the Canadian government’s extensive support for the Israeli occupation and colonization, and Canada’s status as “Israel’s best friend,” to draw out the linkages between Canada’s repression of Indigenous self-determination at home and support for settler colonialism abroad.<sup>72</sup>

A few years later, these connections were made even more explicit, during the Standing Rock protests against the Dakota Access Pipeline. The protests emerged in 2016 when Energy Transfer Partners gained approval to construct a pipeline that would run from Western North Dakota to Southern Illinois, crossing the Missouri and Mississippi rivers and running underneath Lake Oahe near the Standing Rock Reservation. The Sioux Nation of Standing Rock organized a direct-action group and social media campaign to stop the pipeline, which would contaminate the region’s water supply from the Missouri river, used for drinking water and to irrigate farmlands, and threaten sacred burial grounds, leading to irreversible damage to their environment and cultural heritage.<sup>73</sup> Nearly 15,000 protestors gathered and camped at the construction site to stage a sit-in that lasted for months.<sup>74</sup> Activists in the Palestine movement put forward solidarity statements and joined the protests, but as we saw in the opening paragraph to this chapter, the connections with Palestine were also enacted through a sign that deemed the protest site “the

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<sup>69</sup> Digital interview with Hammam Farrah from Toronto, Ontario by author, 13 March 2020.

<sup>70</sup> *US Palestinian Community Network*, “Palestinians in Solidarity with Idle No More and Indigenous Rights.”

<sup>71</sup> Ibid.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid.

<sup>73</sup> Sam Levin, “Dakota Access Pipeline: The Who, What and Why of the Standing Rock Protests,” *The Guardian*, 3 November 2016, <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2016/nov/03/north-dakota-access-oil-pipeline-protests-explainer>.

<sup>74</sup> The protests led to a temporary halt to the construction process, but the legal battle continues: *Reuters*, “U.S. Court Allows Dakota Access Oil Pipeline to Stay Open, but Permit Status Unclear,” 5 August 2020, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-pipeline-dakota-access/u-s-court-allows-dakota-access-oil-pipeline-to-stay-open-but-permit-status-unclear-idUSKCN2512X8>.

West Bank.<sup>75</sup> As images and videos of the Standing Rock protests traveled, they communicated the force of Indigenous resistance and its comparability to the Palestinian liberation movement to an increasingly global audience. Journalists started reporting on the violent crackdown of the protests, and showed that G4S, one of the private security companies deployed at the site, also operates in Occupied Palestine.<sup>76</sup>

When Palestinian activists declared support for the Wet'suwet'en, a First Nations people who initiated protests against the Coastal GasLink Pipeline in British Columbia, these comparative connections were drawn once again.<sup>77</sup> My initial fieldwork period in Turtle Island coincided with these protests, and when I attended events for Palestine organized in around Toronto as part of Israeli Apartheid Week 2020, the connections between the Palestinian predicament and the Wet'suwet'en protests were the main topic of conversation, both during the scheduled talks and among the members of the audience. The drawing of connections increasingly moved from the settler colonial past to the settler colonial present. People argued, at events and in solidarity statements, that the Royal Canadian Mounted Police operating on Wet'suwet'en territory "is employing tactics and equipment similar to Israel's government, including Caterpillar bulldozers, to seize Indigenous lands."<sup>78</sup> The modes of social organization that emerged during at the Standing Rock protest camps also became compared to those created by Palestinians during the First Intifada.<sup>79</sup> In these moments of Indigenous organizing, a catastrophic shift is created, in that Turtle Island and Palestine become positioned in explicit relation to one another.

Through these contentious episodes and connections, the notion that Indigeneity is not compatible with active resistance is subsiding. This has had real implications, as New Mexico-based lawyer Jeff explained to me. Jeff had come to New Mexico from Chicago where he had had his own law office for 35 years, the Black Panthers being among his clients. Now, he works primarily on Indigenous cases in and beyond New Mexico, including Standing Rock, and does legal and organizational work for movements for Palestine. Beyond grassroots organizing, legal battles have become a prime mode of fighting for Indigenous land and water rights, including at Standing Rock, where the Sioux Tribe challenged the Dakota Access Pipeline and won the case.<sup>80</sup> Yet, over the last several years, Jeff has also seen a shift take place in legislation, where Indigenous people are increasingly targeted through criminal law.

Most importantly, Jeff conveys, this was done through so-called "critical infrastructure" laws. Anything that carries oil or is part of that process is now deemed critical infrastructure. Due

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<sup>75</sup> Solidarity statements emerged not only from the Palestinian diaspora but also from inside Palestine itself, such as this one from Gaza: Israa Suliman, "A letter from Gaza to the Natives of Standing Rock," *We Are Not Numbers*, accessed 6 October 2022, [https://wearenotnumbers.org/home/story/gaza\\_stands\\_with\\_standing\\_rock/](https://wearenotnumbers.org/home/story/gaza_stands_with_standing_rock/).

<sup>76</sup> Sarah Lazare, "Reckless Security Firm Hired to Protect Dakota Pipeline Company Has Dark Past in Palestine," *Global Research*, 12 September 2016, <https://www.globalresearch.ca/reckless-security-firm-hired-to-protect-dakota-pipeline-company-has-dark-past-in-palestine/5545295>.

<sup>77</sup> *Adalah Justice Project*, "Share Widely Palestinian Collective Call for Solidarity with Wetsuweten," 4 March 2020, <https://www.adalahjusticeproject.org/equalityreport/2020/3/4/share-widely-palestinian-collective-call-for-solidarity-with-wetsuweten>.

<sup>78</sup> *BDS Movement*, "Palestinians Stand in Solidarity with the Wet'suwet'en Nation," 13 February 2020, <https://bdsmovement.net/news/palestinians-stand-solidarity-wetsuweten-nation-and-land-defenders>.

<sup>79</sup> Nick Estes, *Our history is the future: Standing Rock versus the Dakota Access Pipeline, and the long tradition of Indigenous resistance* (London: Verso Books, 2019), 156.

<sup>80</sup> *Clearing House*, "Case: Standing Rock Sioux Tribe v. United States Army Corps of Engineers," accessed 13 December 2022, <https://clearinghouse.net/case/16671/>. For a more comprehensive history of native court cases, see M. Todd Henderson, *Native Americans and the Supreme Court* (Cheltenham: Edward Elgar Publishing, 2022).

to this change, criminal penalties can be prescribed for interference with - or even just being at a site of - oil production. As Jeff outlined:

It used to be that you might get charged with criminal damage to property or trespassing. Now those oil pipelines or the equipment that is being used, the bulldozers, the earth-digging equipment, everything that's part of it, the transfer stations, they call that critical infrastructure. So, the state will pass a law that instead of it being a misdemeanor with a one-year penalty, it becomes a felony to even interfere with the pipeline in any way, and a ten-year penalty. ... Almost every state now has some version of that. And it's mostly Native Americans who are the victims or at least the targets of that.<sup>81</sup>

Indigenous people in anti-pipeline movements, such as those at Standing Rock or Wet'suwet'en, are also increasingly painted as dangerous by the police, and have been made subject of FBI terrorism taskforce investigations.<sup>82</sup> The connections with movements for Palestine have only contributed to the criminalization of Indigenous resistance. Leaked documents by TigerSwan, another private security agency contracted by the pipeline company to protect the Standing Rock site notes that "the presence of additional Palestinians in the camp, and the movement's involvement with Islamic individuals is a dynamic that requires further examination."<sup>83</sup>

The resurgence of Indigenous resistance thus paved the way for - and went hand in hand with - the explicit comparability with Palestine. In recent years, this comparability has been made a permanent part of campaigns by Native organizations such as the Red Nation, which as positioned Palestine as "the moral barometer of Indigenous North America."<sup>84</sup> This has significant implications, to which we will return later in this chapter. Yet, while these comparative connections are being forged, there are also critiques and negotiations about whether the comparison ought to be made, and if so, on which terms. As such, there are ongoing attempts to think through what kind of relationships between Palestine and Turtle Island are drawn through comparisons of Indigeneity.

### 3. Indigeneity and Failure: Tragic Fates and Hopeful Futures

We have seen how more subliminal resonances between Palestine and Turtle Island are crafted into more explicit modes of comparability. Yet, ever since comparisons between Palestinians and other Native peoples have been drawn, critiques of the comparative relationship between Palestine and Turtle Island have emerged. People worry that by establishing similarities, particular understandings of Indigeneity will be applied to Palestine, and that with that will come connotations of failure attached to the fate of Native people in Turtle Island. In this section, I zoom in on these critiques, and on the ways in which they are challenged and negotiated through the assertion of a more contentious interpretation of Indigeneity, based on the ongoingness of Indigenous resistance in Turtle Island.

In 1987, when Yasser Arafat was first presented with the notion that Palestinians are an Indigenous people just as Native Americans are, he proclaimed: "We are not [red] Indians."<sup>85</sup> He dreaded comparing Palestinians to Indigenous groups in North America that had become

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<sup>81</sup> Interview with Jeffrey Haas in Santa Fe, New Mexico by author, 23 March 2022.

<sup>82</sup> *The Guardian*, "Revealed: FBI terrorism taskforce investigating Standing Rock activists," 10 February 2017, <https://amp.theguardian.com/us-news/2017/feb/10/standing-rock-fbi-investigation-dakota-access>.

<sup>83</sup> *The Intercept*, "Internal TigerSwan Situation Report 2016-09-22," 27 May 2017, <https://theintercept.com/document/2017/05/27/internal-tigerswan-situation-report-2016-09-22/>.

<sup>84</sup> *The Red Nation*, "The Liberation of Palestine Represents an alternative Path for Native Nations," accessed 6 October 2022, <https://therednation.org/the-liberation-of-palestine-represents-an-alternative-path-for-native-nations/>.

<sup>85</sup> Yasser Arafat in Scott MacLeod, "An Interview with Yasser Arafat," *New York Review of Books*, 11 June 1987.

enclaved in reservations and pushed to the social and geographic margins of U.S. society.<sup>86</sup> While direct comparisons of Palestinians as Indigenous people were sporadic at the time, there had been, as we have seen, contact between the AIM and the PLO, and activists were well aware of both situations of settler colonialism.<sup>87</sup> Even so, Arafat contested the notion that Palestinians should be Indigenous in the same way. Not long before he died in 2004, he made this point again:

We have made the Palestinian case the biggest problem in the world ... One hundred and seven years after the [founding Zionist] Basel Conference, 90 years after the Sykes-Picot Agreement, Israel has failed to wipe us out. We are here, in Palestine, facing them. We are not Red Indians.<sup>88</sup>

Similarly, in an interview at the Red Nation's Native Liberation Conference in 2018, a Gazan student details that she felt offended when she arrived in Turtle Island and first learned about the notion of Palestinians as "Indigenous." "We are still there," she thought, "why are you making us Indigenous as if we're [...] not there anymore?"<sup>89</sup>

These connotations of failure and invisibility arose in many of my conversations about comparisons between Turtle Island and Palestine, as they seemed to shape the ways in which connections between these two contexts were drawn. As Jennifer M. told me:

One thing that we hear Palestinian comrades say is that when they look at us, when they look at the state of Native people, they see a potential future for them and it's a future that they want to avoid, which makes sense. In some ways it can manifest as not necessarily reciprocal. The last thing they want is to end up like us, and I can completely agree.<sup>90</sup>

Comparing Palestine to Turtle Island as the possible future resembles the comparisons with Ireland and South Africa. Yet, whereas the Irish situation was construed as an example of a hopeful horizon of continued struggle, comparisons with Turtle Island, like those with South Africa, are thought to posit a bleak future.

Yet unlike in South Africa, the relationship is also reversed in Turtle Island, in that the Palestinian resistance movement comes to provide an example of a hope. As Jennifer continued:

One of our comrades who went [to Palestine] said: 'if they look at us as their potential future, then I look at them as where we could have been.' The sense of kinship and family and the way they still preserve their sense of identity, even though they are under constant attack. And she said that it actually made her realize how far gone we've become as Native people struggling against settler colonialism and having lived under it for so long... She said: 'I looked at the cities. Even the cities to me looked like what it could have been like if we eventually got to develop cities here.'<sup>91</sup>

Jennifer points at the consolidation of the settler state in Turtle Island and how difficult it has become for Indigenous people to even imagine a reality in which their lifeworlds would reflect their own beliefs, politics, and cultural practices (to the extent that these could still be seen as separate from settler culture).

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<sup>86</sup> Ilan Pappé, "Indigeneity as Resistance," in *Rethinking Statehood in Palestine: Self-Determination and Decolonization Beyond Partition*, ed. Leila H. Farsakh (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2021), 276-294.

<sup>87</sup> *American Indian Movement*, "AIM's international contacts."

<sup>88</sup> Graham Usher's interview with Yasser Arafat, quoted in Lila Abu-Lughod, "Imagining Palestine's alter-natives: Settler colonialism and museum politics," *Critical Inquiry* 47, no. 1 (2020): 14.

<sup>89</sup> *The Red Nation*, "Red Revolution Radio: Palestinian Liberation: Addameer Panel – August 11, 2018," 21 January 2019, <http://therednation.org/red-revolution-radio-palestinian-liberation-addameer-panel-august-11-2018/>.

<sup>90</sup> Digital interview with Jennifer Marley from San Ildefonso Pueblo, New Mexico by author, 5 May 2022.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*

To many, it appears as if the United States and Canada are no longer projects of active settler colonial occupation, but legitimate and normalized nation-states - something that is also taking place in the case of Israel but is still more actively contested. As Jennifer reflected:

Many people still deny that settler colonialism is an ongoing thing here. And I think until they see a place like Palestine or hear from a Palestinian person, it's hard for them to realize the place we're in and that it's not a place we would have ever ended up had we been left to be on our own trajectory, undisturbed by settler colonialism. It's a harsh reality to face.<sup>92</sup>

It is this continued struggle against the Israeli colonial project that can inspire the refusal of this supposed normalcy in Turtle Island and the envisioning of a different kind of reality.

But not only is this way of construing the comparison challenged by Palestinians like Arafat, who do not want to be caught in the narrative of eventual failure, there are also critiques of whether it benefits Indigenous people in Turtle Island. As Steven Salaita argues: "This formulation, however well-intentioned, does a tremendous disservice to Natives. A less sanguine reading might observe that it reinforces an ongoing colonial erasure of Indigenous peoples in (and beyond) North America."<sup>93</sup> In fact, "the model of Native Americans as Palestine's nightmare scenario," in Salaita's words, "reproduces the logic of settler colonization."<sup>94</sup> As he explains:

Of course we don't want Palestinians to be forever deprived of their homeland or exist as romantic emblems of an irretrievable past. Nor do we want Israel to eternally occupy Palestine's history. But Indian Country isn't an example of such closures having occurred. The United States and Canada haven't yet managed to settle the matter of their permanent supremacy. ... Any notion that Natives lost is a triumph of US and Canadian colonial discourses.<sup>95</sup>

Reflecting on this formulation, Salaita states: "I don't want to suggest that the logic I critique is a standard or even normal perception among Palestine activist communities around the world."<sup>96</sup> "However," he continues, "I have encountered some variation of 'we don't want to become like the Indians' enough times to say the formulation does exist."<sup>97</sup> While Chapter 7 will take a closer look at debates on Indigeneity within Palestine itself, I also encountered this narrative in Turtle Island from various perspectives.

Palestinian-American organizer Samia approached the issue pragmatically:

Arafat might have said it like 'we're not a dead cause. We're not over with.' But if you hear the Indigenous community telling you: 'we have faith in Palestine.' Who are we to take away from that? If they say: 'we can see hope, you give us life,' what more can you want for Palestine?<sup>98</sup>

For her, the comparison continues to serve the aim of establishing connections, despite any notions of failure. For her, this was only one way of construing the comparison, which could also be reinterpreted in more hopeful terms. For the Native people she worked with, this kind of comparison with Palestine was pivotal, she emphasized. "They saw a roadmap for themselves."<sup>99</sup>

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<sup>92</sup> Ibid.

<sup>93</sup> Steven Salaita, "The Native American model of Palestine's future," *The Electronic Intifada*, 10 March 2016, <https://electronicintifada.net/blogs/steven-salaita/Native-american-model-palestines-future>.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid.

<sup>98</sup> Digital interview with Samia Assed living in Albuquerque, New Mexico by author, 28 January 2022.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid.



Red Nation organizer Elena, in turn, vehemently opposed the connotations of failure: “that’s when Arafat lost me,” she said.<sup>100</sup> She explained that similar to many other Native tribes in Turtle Island, the Navajo and Pueblo peoples among whom she grew up had never been moved or left their land:

We’ve been where we are for millennia. We have never been moved, and we have never ceded any land. When the Spanish colonized here, they actually – thank you very much – they deeded the Pueblo leaders the rights to their own land. ... We in the Southwest, and I would include the Pueblo people, the Diné or Navajo people, and the Apache people, our land is held in trust by the federal government, so we’re actually wards of the state. But we cannot sell the land and it cannot be individually allocated, so in a way that has protected the land base.”<sup>101</sup>

After the signing of the Indian Removal Act, throughout the 1830s to 1850s, Indigenous people from the Southeast were forcibly removed to so-called “Indian Territory” west of the Mississippi River along what is now known as the “Trail of Tears.”<sup>102</sup> Yet, these forced removals have never taken place in the Southwest, nor have treaties been enforced to make Indigenous peoples sign over the land, which therefore remains unceded. While Elena did away with connotations of failure, this provided only more reason for her to strengthen comparisons between both ongoing struggles to retain control of the land. “There are way more similarities between Indigenous communities across Turtle Island and the Palestinians than Arafat could even dream of,” she proclaimed.<sup>103</sup>

In my conversation with Jennifer M., there was a nuanced assessment of notions of failure arising from the comparison between Turtle Island and Palestine. While the struggle in Palestine is more recent and, in many ways, more active, this did not imply that Indigenous people in Turtle Island are entirely lost or powerless in comparison. Despite her belief that Indigenous people in Turtle Island probably had more to learn from Palestinians than vice versa, Jennifer emphasized the fact that her Pueblo community is still persisting:

We are still strong and struggling ourselves. Pueblo people, I would say, have preserved quite – I mean, I don’t want to buy into any weird anthropological notions of purity – but Pueblo people have preserved ceremonial life in a pretty good capacity, and it often was by pretty intense measures. We’re still very closed people and very private people. But we wouldn’t have had to do that had we not been colonized this long.<sup>104</sup>

Therefore, she concluded that “even from where we’re at, yes, there is hope.”<sup>105</sup>

This shows that despite the asymmetries that appear between Palestine and Turtle Island, a sense of the ongoingness of both situations can - and in fact often does - emerge through comparing them. This sense of ongoingness strengthens the critique of settler colonial normality in Turtle Island, by allowing people to envision how things might have been or could still be. At the same time, the notion of ongoingness also challenges connotations of failure, positioning the struggle for Indigenous sovereignty as an active endeavor. This is becoming increasingly important within debates on Indigeneity and settlerness in Turtle Island.

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<sup>100</sup> Digital interview with Elena Ortiz from Santa Fe, New Mexico by author, 13 January 2022.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid.

<sup>102</sup> This includes Cherokee, Muscogee, Seminole, Chickasaw, and Choctaw peoples. Gloria Jahoda, *The trail of tears: The story of the American Indian removals 1813-1855* (New York: Wings Books, 1975).

<sup>103</sup> Ibid.

<sup>104</sup> Digital interview with Jennifer Marley from San Ildefonso Pueblo, New Mexico by author, 5 May 2022.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid.

#### 4. Challenging Comparisons: Complicating Indigeneity and Settlerism

We have seen how comparisons between Turtle Island and Palestine are contested and negotiated due to possible connotations of failure attached to them. Through the resurgence of Indigenous resistance in Turtle Island in previous years, the ongoingness of attempts to establish Indigenous sovereignty has become clearer. As such, a more active and resistant understanding of what it means to be Indigenous is emerging. As this section shows, this understanding is also becoming increasingly important within Turtle Island itself, where the meanings of Indigeneity and settlerism have become subject to widespread debates, not in the least part within Indigenous communities themselves.

Thus far, we have considered how the experiences of Palestinians are established as comparable to those of Native people in Turtle Island. Yet, this is not a uniform process across and within Native communities. When I spoke to Jennifer D., a Navajo woman, it became clear to me that the crafting of comparability with Palestine is a highly tenuous process. Jennifer's parents had both gone to the Stewart Indian Boarding School in Nevada, where they also met, and as such, Jennifer did not grow up speaking the Navajo language as a child. Still, Jennifer was highly interested in Native culture and history, so interested, that she decided to pursue higher education and in 1999, she became the first Navajo woman to obtain a PhD. Now working as a university professor, Jennifer continues to be highly outspoken in her support of Native people and their historiography. Over time, Jennifer came to recognize the similarities with Palestine and speak out for Palestinians too.

Yet, while Jennifer encountered much support for her work on Native historiography within her community, it is whenever she speaks of Palestine that she is met with much adversity. As she experienced, the conversation about Palestine is contentious across Turtle Island, including in Native communities. Many Native people I spoke to told me that narratives on Palestine in their communities are influenced heavily by U.S. and Canadian media outlets, which tend to be supportive of Israel. As a result, when Native people campaign for Palestine in their communities, they find that others are often not entirely aware of the shared settler colonial context and other parallels between the two. While drawing those parallels often does incite understanding or support, this is definitely not always the case.

Indeed, in some Native communities, especially among the Navajo, pro-Israeli voices dominate. The Navajo have historically had a particularly close relationship with the U.S., with many Navajos serving in the U.S. military. Overall, the percentage of Native people in the military is estimated to be higher than any other population group.<sup>106</sup> This is often explained through the legacy of the boarding school system which sought to assimilate Native people in settler society, with the military being one of the only sectors in society where Native people were not segregated.<sup>107</sup> Militarization, in other words, became a way of legitimizing Native citizenship.<sup>108</sup> Additionally, the military continues to form a way to escape the poverty that exists on Indigenous reservations.<sup>109</sup> During World War II, the Navajo were also specifically recruited

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<sup>106</sup> NICOA, "American Indian Veterans Have Highest Record of Military Service," 8 November 2019, <https://www.nicoa.org/american-indian-veterans-have-highest-record-of-military-service/>.

<sup>107</sup> Jennifer Nalewicki, "Native Americans Leave Profound Impact on the Military," *Team Rubicon*, accessed 6 October 2022, <https://teambubiconusa.org/blog/Native-americans-leave-profound-impact-on-the-military/>.

<sup>108</sup> Tom Holm, "The militarization of Native America: Historical process and cultural perception," *The Social Science Journal* 34, no. 4 (1997): 461-474.

<sup>109</sup> Nalewicki, "Native Americans Leave Profound Impact on the Military."

as so-called “code talkers,” soldiers who could use their Native language to get secret messages across the battlefield. For this reason, they are often valued as allies to the settler colonial state: “the code talkers represented a tribe so loyal to our country, in spite of their bitter heritage, that they poured out of the far reaches of the reservation in great numbers.”<sup>110</sup> These notions of patriotism and military service often mean that Navajo leaders are relatively uncritical of the U.S. and follow it in its support of Israel.

These sentiments are strengthened through explicit Israeli attempts to draw connections with the Navajo. “Different organizations inside Israel have actively hoarded relationships with Native nations,” Jennifer M. said. She recounted how she herself has been approached by several Zionists organizations wanting her to support their initiatives around alliances with Native peoples: “then I ask them about Palestine, and at least two have literally just hung up on me.”<sup>111</sup> Even so, among other people in her community, these linkages have gained ground over time, as she explained:

There is this giant warehouse building in Gallup, I don’t know the name of it, where they are proselytizing. They’re trying to get more Navajo. One of my nieces went to some of their meetings and she would tell me that they were actively supporting Israel, and then that gets filtered to Navajo people and to our leadership.<sup>112</sup>

The Navajo Nation leadership has indeed become known for its pro-Israeli sentiments. Myron Lizer, the current Vice President of the Navajo Nation, promotes partnering with Israel to develop “the understanding that Israel and the Navajo Nation share a lot of the same hardships and opportunities as a First Nations people.”<sup>113</sup> In recent years the Navajo Nation leadership has visited Israel to learn about and establish partnerships on the terrain of drinking water and irrigation.<sup>114</sup>

Other Indigenous communities have also established connections to Israel. Indigenous Bridges, a Native American-Israeli Diaspora organization, aims to strengthen ties through cultural and economic solidarity and exchange visits between Israel and Indigenous reservations.<sup>115</sup> Likewise, the First Nations community Norway House organizes youth trips to Israel for Indigenous youth based on the belief that “the Israeli experience – the Indigenous Jewish nation’s struggle to thrive against the odds after being dispossessed from its ancestral homeland – naturally resonates with Canada’s First Nations.”<sup>116</sup> As is discussed in more detail in Chapter 7, these connections underwrite countervailing Israeli claims to Indigeneity. As one Métis writer argues, “to say that Palestinian Arabs were the first inhabitants of the land of Israel is problematic for actual Indigenous people like the Jewish people.”<sup>117</sup>

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<sup>110</sup> Doris Atkinson Paul, *The Navajo Code Talkers* (Pittsburgh: Dorrance Publishing, 1998), xii.

<sup>111</sup> Digital interview with Jennifer Denetdale from Albuquerque, New Mexico on 21 March 2022.

<sup>112</sup> Ibid.

<sup>113</sup> *Navajo Nation Office of the President and Vice President*, “Myron Lizer,” accessed 21 September 2022, <https://www.opvp.navajo-nsn.gov/About-Us/Vice-President-Myron-Lizer>.

<sup>114</sup> *The Times of Israel*, “Navajo president, first lady visit Israel on agricultural tech mission,” 11 December 2012, <https://www.timesofisrael.com/navajo-president-first-lady-visit-israel-on-agricultural-tech-mission/>; *The Jerusalem Post*, “Israeli, Native American partnership brings clean drinking water to Navajo Nation,” 8 July 2021, <https://www.jpost.com/international/israeli-native-american-partnership-brings-clean-water-to-navajo-nation-673225>.

<sup>115</sup> Hagay Hacohen, “Jews and Native Americans: Brothers in the Great Spirit,” *The Jerusalem Post*, 19 May 2020, <https://www.jpost.com/diaspora/jews-and-native-americans-brothers-in-the-great-spirit-627955>.

<sup>116</sup> *The Center for Israel and Jewish Affairs*, “First Nations Tribe Brings Youth to Israel for Inspiration, 22 February 2016, <https://cija.ca/first-nations-tribe-israel/>.

<sup>117</sup> *Tablet Mag*, “Are Jews Indigenous to the Land of Israel?” 9 February 2017, <https://www.tabletmag.com/sections/israel-middle-east/articles/bellerose-aboriginal-people>.

These efforts have been deemed “redwashing”: “a term used to describe how Zionists recruit Indigenous people to normalize the Israeli settler project.”<sup>118</sup> For the Red Nation, a key aim is to hold Native leaders accountable when they take pro-Zionist and anti-Palestinian positions by aligning with Israeli settler colonialism or make anti-Palestinian statements as part of their political platforms.<sup>119</sup> The increasing prevalence of redwashing, however, also lays bare some of the difficulties with the term “Indigenous.” As Palestinian-Canadian organizer Hammam admitted, “to go back in time and claim that you were there first, that’s really open to interpretation of history, we’re all a mixed bag.”<sup>120</sup> Along with the critiques of notions of failure, a major concern is that the comparison with Native people will become mobilized and weaponized by supporters of Israel, including within Turtle Island, given that it’s historical meaning is so open to interpretation. This begs the question of whether it is fruitful to construe Palestinians *as* Indigenous in and of themselves, or whether it will work to undermine the Palestinian cause.

Yet, this is where the more active, ongoing, and resistant interpretation of Indigeneity again provides different answers. In the context of the resurgence of Indigenous resistance, the meaning of Indigeneity has come to be interpreted away from primordial notions. In primordial understandings of Indigeneity, the focus is on establishing the historical continuity between communities in the present and in the (far) past. As Hammam described, this concerns the issue of being there first. Indigenous communities are then defined according to particular criteria that are assumed to reveal historical continuity. Criteria can be grounded in physiology but are more often based on the continuation of languages and cultural practices. What can be named “Indigenous” depends on attributes and characteristics that are assumed to be unchanging.<sup>121</sup>

This primordial-cultural understanding is the basis upon which Indigenous rights are defined in international political arenas. The criteria that ought to be met to qualify as an Indigenous people under international law stress cultural uniqueness and traditional cultural practices.<sup>122</sup> This legal understanding of Indigeneity is ultimately focused on providing collective rights within settler societies. By being identified as “Indigenous,” communities are able to claim the right to access or own traditional lands, practice self-government in local affairs, form institutions, speak Native languages, and to protect cultural or spiritual traditions.<sup>123</sup> Therefore, the use of this definition by Indigenous peoples themselves can sometimes be seen as instrumental.<sup>124</sup> Yet, the Indigenous status under international law “is designed and restricted under certain normative conditions characterized by the prohibition of questioning nation-state sovereignty.”<sup>125</sup> In other words, primordial-cultural understanding of Indigeneity, as enshrined in international law, does not provide true political sovereignty.

Within renewed moments of Indigenous organizing, these primordial-cultural criteria are abandoned for a more explicitly political definition, based around the experience of (settler)

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<sup>118</sup> *Samidoun*, “The Red Nation: The Liberation of Palestine Represents an alternative Path for Native Nations,” 17 September 2019, <https://samidoun.net/2019/09/the-red-nation-the-liberation-of-palestine-represents-an-alternative-path-for-native-nations/>.

<sup>119</sup> *The Red Nation*, “The Liberation of Palestine Represents an alternative Path for Native Nations.”

<sup>120</sup> Digital interview with Hammam Farrah from Toronto, Ontario by author, 13 March 2020.

<sup>121</sup> Anaïd Flesken, “Ethnicity without group: Dynamics of indigeneity in Bolivia,” *Nationalism and Ethnic Politics* 19, no. 3 (2013): 333-353.

<sup>122</sup> *United Nations*, “Indigenous Peoples at the United Nations,” accessed 6 October 2022, <https://www.un.org/development/desa/Indigenouspeoples/about-us.html>.

<sup>123</sup> *United Nations*, “United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.”

<sup>124</sup> Mathias Guenther, Justin Kenrick, Adam Kuper, Evie Plaice, Trond Thuen, Patrick Wolfe, Werner Zips, and Alan Barnard, “The concept of indigeneity,” *Social Anthropology* 14, no. 1 (2006): 17-32.

<sup>125</sup> Erika León Angulo, “The legal imaginary of” indigeneity”: Creating knowledge, subjects, and law,” *Oñati Socio-Legal Series* 12, no. 4 (2022): 948.

colonialism. Being Indigenous is increasingly interpreted as something else than simply “being there first” or having particular cultural traditions. Instead, it “is a political condition that challenges the existence and domination of colonial nation-states.”<sup>126</sup> While Israeli settlers may claim Indigeneity, this separates the term from the political context in which it gains its most important meaning, which is the imposition of the Israeli state over the existing population, whose prior presence makes them Indigenous.<sup>127</sup> Academic literatures have theorized how settlers come to claim Indigeneity to assert settler identity; to destroy the Native by replacing it.<sup>128</sup> These insights have also come to be important also within Turtle Island itself, where recent years have seen the rise of the “pretendian:” a non-Native person who claims Indigeneity, for example to gain career or financial benefits.<sup>129</sup>

This political understanding of Indigeneity is not only compatible with active resistance but closely connected to it. The focus is no longer on primordial-cultural criteria that are assumed to reveal historical continuity, but rather, on the concrete experience of settler colonialism both in the past and in the present. This political understanding of Indigeneity strengthens the link between people whose history, existence, and way of life is denied through the establishment of the U.S., Canadian, and Israeli settler colonial projects. This paves the way for the catastrophic (re)drawing of Indigenous relations in recent years. Yet, before I turn to those relations, I briefly turn to the notion of settlerness in Turtle Island, which also gains particular meanings through the more political understanding of indigeneity.

If being Indigenous has come to be associated with a progressive political subjectivity, sometimes even with a certain status or benefits, the identification of a “settler” has become something to avoid in certain circles. During the conversations I had with non-Native people in Turtle Island, I noticed that even when they were aware of, and actively campaigning for Palestinian and Indigenous liberation, and could reflect critically on settler colonialism, it could still be a thorny issue to speak of their settlerness. Non-Nativeness has long been celebrated in Turtle Island, especially within U.S. society. As “nation of immigrants,” the U.S. settler project presents itself as a liberal multicultural entity, where Americanness can be claimed by anyone based on particular values, regardless of prior ties to the land.<sup>130</sup> This narrative celebrates settler colonialism whilst erasing its (ongoing) violence. Within the context of the resurgence of Indigenous resistance, however, this narrative is changing.

Settlerness is in some circles increasingly seen as a shameful thing and discussed through notions such as “settler guilt.”<sup>131</sup> This was also the case within the activist communities I joined, where the notion of settlerness was a contentious issue. When I asked non-Native people what it was like to organize against the settler colonization of Palestine as a settler in Turtle Island, they would often become uncomfortable. As Red Nation organizer Jennifer M. shared:

It’s really interesting when we explain to people that they’re also settlers. On one of the delegations [to Palestine] a comrade went on, there was a White person also present and she said: ‘wow, I never understood what settler colonialism was until I went to Palestine.’ And I’m

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<sup>126</sup> *The Red Nation*, “About.”

<sup>127</sup> Mark Rifkin, “indigeneity, Apartheid, Palestine: On the Transit of Political Metaphors,” *Cultural Critique* 95 (2017): 27.

<sup>128</sup> Patrick Wolfe, “Settler Colonialism and the Elimination of the Native,” *Journal of Genocide Research* 8, no. 4 (2006): 387-409.

<sup>129</sup> E.g., *Maclean’s*, “The Curious Case of Gina Adams: A ‘Pretendian Investigation,’” 6 September 2022,

<https://www.macleans.ca/longforms/the-curious-case-of-gina-adams-a-pretendian-investigation/>.

<sup>130</sup> Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz, *Not a Nation of Immigrants: Settler Colonialism, White Supremacy, and a History of Erasure and Exclusion* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2021).

<sup>131</sup> Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang, “Decolonization is not a metaphor,” *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education & Society* 1, no. 11 (2012): 1–40.

like: why would you say that? Why would you out yourself like that? You spend your life around Native people, doing work with Native people, but you didn't see it until you came to Palestine?

In this case, the delegate's experience of seeing the settler colonization of Palestine hit home, exposing the erasure of her own settler history in catastrophic ways.

When I spoke to Anna, a young non-Native organizer for Palestine in the Toronto area, she professed that recognizing her own settlerness had been a process for her: "I know the beginning of my activism definitely was coming from a point of guilt."<sup>132</sup> Anna recognized the discomfort I noticed around issues of settlerness:

The Indigenous community that lives 20 minutes outside of where I live; they don't have access to clean water. A lot of people will bring up all these issues that are going on [in Palestine], but we're also not talking about the issues that are going on in our backyard. And now I just brought up that water thing, I'm thinking Palestinians don't have access to water in the West Bank, they're restricted. It's no different than what is going on 20 minutes away, but a lot of us feel that it's easier to talk about this than it is to talk about that.<sup>133</sup>

As she continued:

I think that like from a settler point of view being in Turtle Island it's easier to talk about Indigenous struggles in Palestine or somewhere else than it is to talk about it in your own backyard, because you're the one directly benefiting from being on this land. So that's where I feel like there is that disconnect. I find that like a lot of activists do want to talk about what's going on here, but it seems like we always focus on what's going on elsewhere instead of what's going on here.<sup>134</sup>

This is not so say that people necessarily did not want to reflect on the fact that their ancestors came to Turtle Island as settlers, in fact, they often did, but rather that there remained a lot of discomfort around what it means to be a settler, a discomfort that is presumably only becoming stronger as understandings of Indigeneity are further politicized.

These considerations of settlerness also mattered to the Palestinian diaspora in Turtle Island. I only realized this when I spoke to Ibrahim, a second-generation Palestinian-Canadian student involved in activism on his Toronto campus. "I feel guilty," Ibrahim said, "I'm just as bad. My parents, they are Indigenous in Palestine but then they fled the occupation and settled here, so I am Indigenous but also a settler."<sup>135</sup> Samia, the second-generation Palestinian-American woman we met earlier, professed the same sentiments when she spoke about the catastrophic moment she realized that she is also considered a settler:

It was [makes blowing up sound]. It was mind-blowing because the guilt starts to riddle you. You start to reassess everything you do. ... Nobody thinks of themselves as a settler. I tried to explain this to other Palestinian women: you're a settler. They go: 'oh forget it. Don't ever say this. That's not us.' And I tell them: No, you are. You have to understand this is the same project.<sup>136</sup>

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<sup>132</sup> Digital interview with Anna Badillo in Toronto, Ontario by author, 19 March 2021.

<sup>133</sup> Ibid.

<sup>134</sup> Ibid.

<sup>135</sup> Interview with Ibrahim [pseudonym] from Toronto, Ontario on 8 March 2020.

<sup>136</sup> Digital interview with Samia Assed living in Albuquerque, New Mexico by author, 28 January 2022.

Just as people in the Palestinian diaspora can have intimate knowledge of settler colonialism in both Palestine and Turtle Island, so they can get caught in between notions of Indigeneity and settlerness.

At the same time, we may wonder whether the term “settler” fully captures the experiences of Palestinians living in Turtle Island. Indeed, Nandita Sharma has argued that the attribution of this term to migrants ties in with a hardening of nationalism.<sup>137</sup> As Native-ness has become connected to national belonging, migrants, even if they have fled situations of settler colonialism themselves, become considered non-Native.<sup>138</sup> These migrants are now stripped of any reference to being colonized and can therefore even be represented as settler colonists invading Native nations.<sup>139</sup> Given that Palestinians have tended to settle in Turtle Island only because of the occupation of their own land, they do not quite fit within such a binary understanding (and neither do many other groups).

For Samia, however, the discussion of settlerness is necessary to be able to work with Native communities. As one of the most active organizers in the Albuquerque area, Samia is highly involved in connecting campaigns and events for Palestinian liberation to the issues facing local Indigenous communities. To do so, she underlined, “[you have to] recognize how you’re a part of the settler colonial state. When you don’t see that, you will never see these people for who they are. They will never take you seriously. They won’t.”<sup>140</sup> In other words, Samia reflects on how she recognizes she is implicated in the settler state exactly *because* it allows her to form relations with Native people.

The discussions over the meaning of Indigeneity and settlerness in Turtle Island are directly tied to the possible connections that can be drawn with Palestine. While a more primordial or cultural definition can be co-opted within settler culture, allowing for Israeli redwashing as we have seen, a political understanding makes this more difficult. Instead, the political understanding of Indigeneity allows for a more radical re-positioning vis-à-vis settler colonial projects, not only in Turtle Island but in Palestine too, as the next section shows.

## 5. Sacrifice Zones: Comparative Refusals

This chapter has discussed how the experiences of living under settler colonization in Turtle Island and Palestine resonate with one another, and how concrete (though contested) comparisons are crafted between Native peoples in Turtle Island and Palestinians. It has demonstrated that comparisons with Palestine have influenced and been influenced by the resurgence of Indigenous resistance. This has led to more active, political understandings of Indigeneity. This section shows how the focus on active resistance and Indigenous sovereignty takes shape through radical actions of refusal. People in Turtle Island have come to refuse participation in (parts of) the U.S. and Canadian colonial projects, and by extension, in the support provided to Israeli settler colonization in Palestine.

In this moment of renewed Indigenous resistance, emerging in and through comparisons with Palestine, Native people have come to refuse the normalization of the settler colonial state. The refusal of normalization, as mentioned in previous chapters, is a common practice in Palestine. While interpretations vary, normalization refers to the treatment of Israel as a “normal”

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<sup>137</sup> Nandita Sharma, *Home Rule: National Sovereignty and the Separation of Natives and Migrants* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2020).

<sup>138</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>139</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>140</sup> Digital interview with Samia Assed living in Albuquerque, New Mexico by author, 28 January 2022.

state with which business as usual can be conducted.<sup>141</sup> Many Palestinians refuse to participate in discussions and dialogue with Israel unless the settler colonial nature of the situation is acknowledged and addressed.<sup>142</sup> It is precisely this way of refusing normalization that is also increasingly practiced in Turtle Island, which has important implications for Palestine too.

What Indigenous refusal can look like in practice is shown in a short film about the Wet'suwet'en protests against the Coastal GasLink Pipeline. Importantly, refusal is about maintaining Indigenous sovereignty and denaturalizing settler normality, including normalized ideas, practices, and legal or political frameworks. The film shows how a representative of the GasLink project enters Wet'suwet'en territory to post the injunction to start construction for the planned pipeline. He is met by Molly Wickham, a Wet'suwet'en representative, who at first refuses to speak settler language and addresses the man in Wet'suwet'en language. She eventually clarifies in English:

Canadian courts do not have any jurisdiction on Wet'suwet'en territories. The Wet'suwet'en hereditary chiefs have full jurisdiction. We have for thousands of years, since time immemorial. We have never ceded or surrendered any of that jurisdiction.<sup>143</sup>

The next frame of the film shows a Canadian settler police force and helicopters violently entering the territory, upon which Molly raises her voice and says: "You're trespassing on Wet'suwet'en land. You continue to remove us forcibly from our lands with your rifles, with your semi-automatic weapons. Nothing has changed."<sup>144</sup>

For people like me who have lived most of their lives normalizing the Canadian state and its enforcement of authority over Indigenous land, this approach seems radical. Molly invites the viewer to consider what it looks like to refuse normalization and to accept Indigenous sovereignty as a concrete reality. This approach is highly deliberate, as Freda Huson, another Wet'suwet'en chief and representative, explains in the film:

My dad always told me that the only way we're not gonna lose all our traditional territories is that we have to re-occupy them. It's pretty much what settler people have done. They occupied our territories and now they call those municipalities and act like they own it even though it's still Wet'suwet'en lands. [My dad] said we needed to re-occupy and behave like we own it because we do own it. We're behaving like we own these lands and don't need nobody's permission to put up our cabins and we don't need nobody's permission to be here. We only go by our own Wet'suwet'en laws.<sup>145</sup>

Under these laws, the Wet'suwet'en clans have the right and responsibility to control access to the territory. All five clans of the Wet'suwet'en have refused proposals for the pipeline proposals and have not consented to Coastal GasLink's construction work or the company's presence on Wet'suwet'en land. As shown in the film, the armed response to the Wet'suwet'en enforcement of the law reveals how settler normality is violently reinstated.

Audra Simpson has theorized such Indigenous acts of refusal. Based on ethnographic research in her own Kahnawà:ke community, she discusses how the Mohawks, like many other Indigenous people across Turtle Island, refuse to be Canadian or American. As she writes:

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<sup>141</sup> *Jadaliyya*, "Israel's Exceptionalism: Normalizing the Abnormal," 31 October 2011, <https://www.jadaliyya.com/Details/24583>.

<sup>142</sup> Mai Albzour, "The Deconstruction of the Concept of Normalization within the Context of the Settler-Colonialism in Palestine: The Duality of Acceptance and Rejection," *Language, Discourse & Society* 7, no. 2 (2019): 34-54.

<sup>143</sup> *Unistoten Camp*, "Invasion," accessed 29 September 2022, <https://unistoten.camp/media/invasion/>.

<sup>144</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>145</sup> *Ibid.*



Refusal comes with the requirement of having one's political sovereignty acknowledged and upheld, and raises the question of legitimacy for those who are usually in the position of recognizing: What is their authority to do so? Where does it come from? Who are they to do so?<sup>146</sup>

Acts of refusal can manifest through outright contention, such as in the case of the Idle No More, Standing Rock, or Wet'suwet'en protests, or they can be more subtle. Simpson describes how Mohawk travelers were detained in Central America for refusing to present a Canadian passport, travelling on their Iroquois Confederacy passports instead.<sup>147</sup> Some Indigenous organizers I encountered in New Mexico refused to partake in alcohol consumption because of how alcohol was historically used by settlers to influence and subdue Indigenous people. Such small acts of refusal are more common and often characterize Indigenous relations to the settler state.

In recent years, refusals have become more common through so-called "land acknowledgements." These are written or oral statements that recognize and respect Indigenous people as the inhabitants and stewards of a particular territory. They are commonly used at community places, public institutions, and events throughout Turtle Island, and are more prevalent in places with a large Indigenous population such as in Ontario or New Mexico. When I conducted fieldwork in these two places, land acknowledgements would be read aloud at any event for Palestine I attended. An example of such a statement is the following:

United Way of Central New Mexico sits on the traditional, unceded homelands of the Tiwa, Tewa, Diné, and N'de peoples. We recognize that the harms of genocide and colonization are ongoing and know it is our responsibility to work against this historical erasure. ... This acknowledgment only becomes meaningful when combined with accountable relationships and informed actions. It is only a first step. We respect the right to Indigenous sovereignty and self-determination and are committed to uplifting Indigenous voices while being better listeners, learners, and partners.<sup>148</sup>

However, since the reading of a land acknowledgement is becoming widespread, it can sometimes become a performance rather than an actual refusal. When I spoke to Anna, a student-organizer in the Toronto area, she emphasized the importance of taking seriously the implications of the acknowledgement as a refusal. Otherwise, "it's becoming like a checkbox."<sup>149</sup>

Anna suggested that the most effective use of a land acknowledgement is to tie it in with a discussion of what it really means. At events for Palestine, she found that it was precisely the drawing of comparative connections with the Palestinian situation that made the land acknowledgement most meaningful. She recalled how at events for Palestine they would tweak the land acknowledgement. They acknowledged the reality of settler colonization in Turtle Island but then also "threw in a lot of the Palestinian aspects and connected the two."<sup>150</sup> It becomes easier to refuse the ongoingness of settler colonization in Turtle Island, which is often invisibilized, once it is connected to a more visible struggle. Knowing how Palestinians refuse normalization with Israel strengthens the refusal of the normalization of the Canadian and U.S. settler states too.

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<sup>146</sup> Audra Simpson, *Mohawk Interruptus: Political Life Across the Borders of Settler States* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2014), 11.

<sup>147</sup> *Ibid.*, 18-19.

<sup>148</sup> *United Way of Central New Mexico*, "Indigenous Peoples' Land Acknowledgement," accessed 29 September 2022, <https://uwcnm.org/land-acknowledgement/>.

<sup>149</sup> Digital interview with Anna Badillo from Toronto, Ontario by author, 19 March 2021.

<sup>150</sup> *Ibid.*

In New Mexico, people are refusing the settler state in ways that could have direct implications for Palestine. I spoke to Alejandría, a Chicana organizer for land and water justice in the Albuquerque area. Chicax people originally come from Mexico and have mixed European and Indigenous ancestry, yet they choose not to use the term Hispanic, because they wish to reject cultural assimilation into White settler society.<sup>151</sup> Alejandría emphasized her community's connections to the land, but also the fact that they are not Indigenous to it and have to live in agreement with the Native people as the original stewards. In understanding how organizers refuse the settler state and how these refusals are connected to comparisons with Palestine, Alejandría suggested that I pay close attention to the particularity of New Mexico, and most importantly, its status as a sacrifice zone.

Due to its remoteness and low population density, New Mexico has long been used for various industries and operations crucial to the United States as a settler colonial project. It was part of the Western coal territory, the first named sacrifice zone, but its status as a sacrifice zone became even more pronounced during the Cold War.<sup>152</sup> This is when Northern New Mexico was chosen as the primary site of the Manhattan Project, where the United States' first nuclear weapons were produced and tested.<sup>153</sup> As Red Nation organizer Jennifer M. summarized:

New Mexico is essentially a sacrifice zone for the U.S. It's the site of the birth of the nuclear bomb. It's one of the only states where the complete nuclear supply chain exists all in one state without needing to import any materials, from the mining of the uranium to the production of weapons: all of that can be done within the state. If New Mexico were to secede from the U.S., it would be the third strongest world nuclear superpower for this reason. The nuclear bomb was actually first built on my homeland: San Ildefonso Pueblo.<sup>154</sup>

In the process of nuclear development, Indigenous people, including those in Jennifer's community, were sacrificed. Environmental contamination eroded Indigenous peoples' lands and ways of life. While the effects of radiation on nearby Native populations is only now being studied, it is widely known in Native communities that numerous people suffered from radiation-related health problems. Preliminary results of ongoing research show that a quarter of Navajo women and infants who were exposed to radiation at the time still have extremely high levels of the radioactive metal in their systems.<sup>155</sup>

At the same time, other extractive and contaminating industries have ramped up operations in New Mexico. The San Juan Basin has a rich natural gas reserve, and the Permian Basin is the most prolific oil and gas region in the country.<sup>156</sup> These industries are targeted by organizers who refuse the sacrifice of their land and water, but also the larger settler colonial project in which these operations are developed. This is a difficult, heated issue among

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<sup>151</sup> The distinction between Hispanic and Chicano/a/x culture was pointed out as significant by many of my interlocutors in New Mexico. The term "Hispanic" is generally used by people who claim Spanish heritage, whereas the term "Chicano/a/x" is used by people who underline their mixed origins. In practice, most people across these groups have mixed heritage. Therefore, the use of terminology is usually informed by how people choose to present themselves. Additionally, Hispanic and Chicano/a/x people may both identify as "Latino/a/x," meaning they have Latin American ancestry.

<sup>152</sup> National Research Council Study Committee on the Potential for Rehabilitating Lands Surface Mined for Coal in the Western United States, *Rehabilitation potential of western coal lands* (Cambridge: Ballinger Publishing Company, 1974).

<sup>153</sup> Peter Bacon Hales, *Atomic spaces: Living on the Manhattan project* (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 1999); Joseph Masco, *The Nuclear Borderlands: The Manhattan Project in Post-Cold War New Mexico* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2006).

<sup>154</sup> Jennifer Marley in *The Funambulist*, "The Red Deal: An Indigenous Manual to Decolonize and Heal the Earth," 30 April 2021, <https://thefunambulist.net/magazine/decolonial-ecologies/the-red-deal-an-indigenous-manual-to-decolonize-and-heal-the-earth>.

<sup>155</sup> *CPR News*, "Navajo Nation Still Shows Uranium Exposure Today, Decades After Atomic Age Mining," 8 October 2019, <https://www.cpr.org/2019/10/08/navajo-nation-still-shows-uranium-exposure-today-decades-after-cold-war-mining/>.

<sup>156</sup> *Inside Climate News*, "New Mexico Wants it 'Both Ways,' Insisting on Environmental Regulations While Benefiting from Oil and Gas," 27 February 2022, <https://insideclimatenews.org/news/27022022/new-mexico-oil-gas-flaring-venting/>.

Indigenous people in the region, especially since the Navajo Nation Oil and Gas Company (NNOGC) owns and operates part of the fossil fuel business in the San Juan Basin.<sup>157</sup> Yet for those who refuse participation in the settler colonial project, the refusal to be sacrificed is key. Organizers connect settler colonial sacrificial practices from the historical gold and silver quests in the Southwestern deserts to the ravaging of Indigenous land and water today.<sup>158</sup>

In recent years, as Alejandría argues, the refusal to be sacrificed has gone hand in hand with increasing connections to Palestine. “A lot of the resources that are mined in New Mexico, and are refined to become weapons, are directly being sent to Palestine,” Alejandría explained.<sup>159</sup> The sacrifice of New Mexico for the U.S. settler colonial project is thus directly tied to the sacrifice of Palestinians for Israeli colonization. “We live in the belly of the beast,” Jennifer M. agreed, which makes it important “to do as much as we can to sway, not only other Native people, but everybody else.”<sup>160</sup> Alejandría did consider this feasible: “New Mexico has a different history with the U.S., and I think that New Mexicans in general are more open to calling out the U.S. government because our tax dollars are going to funding this settler colony overseas.”<sup>161</sup>

The refusal to normalize settler colonial projects and the sacrifices they require are thus shaped and strengthened through comparisons to Palestine. Indigenous organizers and their allies refuse to take part in (parts of) the normal everyday reality in the so-called United States or Canada. Most important among them are the rejection of settler naming practices, which we have seen throughout this chapter and in which most people I spoke to engaged, and the disregarding of settler legal and political systems. This is never a “pure” endeavor, in that Indigenous peoples’ lives are entangled with the settler colonial state in a multiplicity of ways and it is therefore impossible for most people to refuse all interrelations with the state. In some cases, as in New Mexico, it is a partial refusal on purpose, in that organizers refuse participation in destructive industries, yet use their citizenship in the settler state as leverage.

Acts of refusal have become most prominent and through the “Land Back” and “Water Back” movements. These are a decentralized efforts taking place across Turtle Island to re-establish Indigenous sovereignty over the land and water, aided through the increasing presence of Indigenous people in global climate activism. The overall aim of Land Back and Water Back underlies many of the episodes of Indigenous resistance discussed earlier. Yet the exact meaning of the effort remains an open question today, as lawyer Jeff wondered:

As White people we are settlers here and when we acknowledge we’re on Native land, I don’t think we want to say we’re willing to leave and give it back, but we like to certainly accept a fairer distribution. What does land back mean? And water back? How much and for whom?<sup>162</sup> Yet for Red Nation organizer Elena, the aim is a more radical one:

Right now, land back is a huge rallying cry and people ask me: you don’t really mean that you want the land back? Yes, we do! Every bit of it! We don’t want to force the government to deal with us, we want the government to be abolished and we want land returned to Native people.<sup>163</sup>

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<sup>157</sup> *Navajo Nation Oil and Gas Company*, “What We do,” accessed 7 October 2022, <https://nnohc.com/what-we-do/>.

<sup>158</sup> Len Necefer, “Oak Flat Is No Sacrifice Zone,” *Patagonia*, accessed 6 October 2022, <http://www.patagonia.ca/stories/oak-flat-is-no-sacrifice-zone/story-120206.html>.

<sup>159</sup> Digital interview with Alejandría Lyons from Albuquerque, New Mexico by author, 27 April 2022.

<sup>160</sup> Digital interview with Jennifer Marley from San Ildefonso Pueblo, New Mexico by author, 5 May 2022.

<sup>161</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>162</sup> Interview with Jeffrey Haas in Santa Fe, New Mexico by author, 23 March 2022.

<sup>163</sup> Digital interview with Elena Ortiz from Santa Fe, New Mexico by author, 13 January 2022.

For Elena, the land back in effort is directly connected to the future of Palestine:

I do think that the empire that is the so-called United States is going to fall and with it the support for Israel. And you may see Palestine come out of this. I don't know when, I just know that that's our belief.<sup>164</sup>

In the present moment, these direct connections are still being forged. In 2022, explicit connections between the Land Back movement and the Palestinian demand for the "Right of Return" for refugees are emerging. As an Indigenous collective in Turtle Island states: "The Right of Return and Landback are both promises that harbor the same meaning - that we will outlast colonial governments and laws imposed on us and our relatives and live in right relations back where we are from."<sup>165</sup>

While these connections between various acts of refusal are only just emerging, they project a future beyond settler colonial occupation. In so doing, they are highly catastrophic, in the sense that they disrupt the usual state of affairs and allow for imaginative and generative possibilities. These possibilities, emerging in and through comparison, are as much about (re)drawing relations, as about *withdrawing from* relations. Those who refuse the settler colonial projects of the United States, Canada, or Israel no longer wish to be related to the ideas and institutions that make up those projects, nor do they wish to engage in the broader international relations that grant these projects legitimacy. The example of Mohawk travelers presenting their Iroquois passports constitutes a refusal not only of the Canadian state but also of the broader rules and regulations of international travel and border regimes, whereas organizers in New Mexico want to withdraw not only from participation in the U.S. colonial project but also from the international relations that constitute global weapon manufacturing and the arms trade.

Organizers opt to refuse, at least as much as they can, their relational ties to settler states. These refusals are hard, as the vocabularies, practices, and institutions of settler states pervade people's lives, strengthened by wider international relations that support them and enshrine them into law. Therefore, most attempts to disentangle from the webs of settler social and political life will be either partial, or, at times, performative. By connecting modes of Indigenous and Palestinian sovereignty, however, these refusals can strengthen one another. The connection of acts of refusal and corresponding visions of outlasting colonial governments contributes to the "disordering [of] the current settler dominated reality" and the "taken for-granted nature" of the international relations that reproduce this reality."<sup>166</sup> This creates another mode of international relations, which are based around a different, though not less concrete, shared reality, a reality beyond colonial occupation.

## Conclusion

This chapter has presented an ethnographic analysis of how emergent comparisons between Turtle Island and Palestine translate political experiences and (re)draw political relations. It demonstrated that experiences of settler colonialism in both situations resonate with one another in an intuitive sense, but that they are also increasingly connected through concrete comparisons. These comparisons emerge within a renewed moment of Indigenous resistance in Turtle Island,

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<sup>164</sup> Ibid.

<sup>165</sup> *NDN Collective*, "The Right of Return is Landback," accessed 6 October 2022, <https://ndncollective.org/right-of-return-is-landback/>.

<sup>166</sup> Erich Steinman, "Unsettling as agency: Unsettling settler colonialism where you are," *Settler Colonial Studies* 10, no. 4 (2020): 565-568.

for example during the Idle No More, Standing Rock, and Wet'suwet'en protests, and are also put forward by Indigenous organizations such as the Red Nation. This resurgence of Indigenous resistance reclaims and draws upon centuries of Native struggle that was silenced through the residential school system.

This chapter showed that comparisons between Turtle Island and Palestine establish particular kinds of relations. When Turtle Island is portrayed as a future to be avoided, the relationship becomes largely one-directional, in that Native people can draw more inspiration from Palestinians than vice versa. Yet, when the comparison is construed as one between two ongoing struggles against settler colonialism, Indigeneity itself can gain a more active and indeed inspirational meaning for Palestinians too. In this sense, the shared sense of ongoingness provides a renewed basis for comparative relations.

The chapter then argued that the resurgence of Indigenous resistance and sense of ongoingness are closely connected to a more active and political understanding of what it means to be Indigenous. While countervailing Israeli efforts to establish connections with Native people in Turtle Island are growing, a political understanding of Indigeneity challenges such attempts at redwashing. This political understanding of Indigeneity goes hand in hand with practical efforts to honor Indigenous sovereignty through acts of refusal, most importantly by refusing settler naming practices, disregarding settler legal and political systems and demanding Land Back.

Through these recent and ongoing efforts to rename and reclaim the land, organizers in New Mexico, and Turtle Island more broadly, are drawing the contours of the next chapter in Indigenous organizing, one that refuses the normalization of settler colonial projects. I have showed how these efforts of refusal can draw on and strengthen one another, by allowing for various kinds of withdrawal from and opposition to the settler colonial state, but possibly also by undermining concrete connections between settler colonial projects. These efforts no longer portray the comparison between Turtle Island and Palestine as a losing game, but as a catastrophic effort of comparative refusal.

## Chapter 7 – Crafting Comparability: Composing Palestine

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Palestine is a special case. ... Ireland, Indigenous Americans, South Africa, it's all – there are lots of similarities, but comparison is - I don't know. I'm trying to find a place to compare to Palestine. I would say that if you want to compare, then you can compare to all of them, but with Palestine you need to put them aside and say: this extra thing is happening in Palestine and it's different. ... If you want to compare, you can compare it to all, but Palestine is worse. You always have to mention that Palestine is worse.<sup>1</sup>

### Introduction

As one of the longest running and most enduring issues in international relations, the struggle for Palestine has had many twists and turns.<sup>2</sup> Due to the longevity of the situation and the shifting political landscape, Palestinians have come to develop and deploy various political visions, practices, and strategies over time. In so doing, they have drawn inspiration from other times and places, including, as this chapter demonstrates, through acts of comparison. For Palestinians, crafting comparability with other instances of political contestation is crucial to “de-exceptionalize Palestine as somehow unique and beyond comparison.”<sup>3</sup> In international relations, the situation in Palestine is often positioned as extraordinarily difficult and complex.<sup>4</sup> While the acknowledgement of complexities can be fruitful, this has often translated into an exceptionalist belief that the situation in Palestine is “too convoluted to understand and too intractable to solve.”<sup>5</sup> This chapter probes how comparisons with Ireland, South Africa, and Turtle Island are mobilized to “de-exceptionalize Palestine by locating it in a family of colonial histories.”<sup>6</sup>

Previous chapters have shown that Palestine circulates internationally and has “come to serve as a prism through which to view other political struggles.”<sup>7</sup> Events in Palestine resonate in Ireland, South Africa, and Turtle Island as they translate political experiences, for instance of settler colonialism, apartheid, and marginalization. Comparisons with Palestine are also at the basis of modes of political connectivity, whether through solidarity movements or government connections. As we have seen, the comparisons to Palestine emerging from Ireland, South Africa, and Turtle Island are ultimately rooted in local political contestations. Through comparison, people in these various places connect to different aspects of the Palestinian struggle, in line with their own historical experiences and projected futures. Whereas the previous chapters explored these localized resonances and connections, this chapter focuses on how acts of comparison with these contexts jointly contribute to composing the issue of Palestine.

In this chapter, I thus bring together the comparisons with Ireland, South Africa, and Turtle Island and analyze how they are weighed, judged, negotiated, rejected, and creatively reworked within Palestine itself. By illuminating particular elements of the Palestinian struggle, comparisons with other contexts provide different visions and political possibilities for the

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<sup>1</sup> Digital interview with Mühanned Qafesha from Hebron by author, 25 November 2022.

<sup>2</sup> Collins, *Global Palestine*; Nur Masalha, *Palestine: A Four Thousand Year History* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2018).

<sup>3</sup> Julie Peteet, “Language matters: talking about Palestine,” *Journal of Palestine Studies* 45, no. 2 (2016): 32.

<sup>4</sup> E.g., Beverley Milton-Edwards. *The Israeli-Palestinian Conflict: A People's War* (London: Routledge, 2008).

<sup>5</sup> Deborah J. Gerner, *One land, two peoples: The conflict over Palestine* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2018), 24.

<sup>6</sup> Peteet, “Language matters,” 31.

<sup>7</sup> Rifkin, “Indigeneity, apartheid, Palestine,” 26.

Palestinian struggle for liberation. In this chapter, I probe how these visions and possibilities are mobilized by Palestinians as active makers of comparison. I explore how comparisons with Ireland, South Africa, and Turtle Island are composed into Palestine as a political issue, as they are incorporated into Palestinian political ideas, practices, landscapes, and organizations. Through interviews and ethnographic fieldwork with Palestinians across the West Bank, East Jerusalem, Gaza, and Israel, I thus explore how the issue of Palestine is crafted in and through comparison.

To intimately understand the realities of Palestinian communities, I adhere to language that is most commonly used. Whereas Palestinians living in Israel are often called “Israeli Arabs” by mainstream media outlets, I insist on referring to them as “Palestinians” or “48 Palestinians,” in light with the preferred identification of the majority.<sup>8</sup> As I explained in Chapter 3, the term “48” is used by Palestinians and solidarity activists to denote the year the State of Israel was founded without normalizing the settler colonial project. When I speak of “Israel,” I generally refer to the Israeli settler colonial project and/or the Israeli government, while I use the term “48” to discuss the material territory of the State of Israel today. When I use the term “Palestine,” I refer not only to the Occupied Palestinian Territories, but to the entirety of historical Palestine from the Jordan river to the Mediterranean Sea.<sup>9</sup> These naming practices are shared among nearly all of my interlocutors in this chapter.

This chapter consists of five sections. The first section of this chapter starts in South Africa, as this is the primary object of comparisons within Palestine. I explore how comparisons to South Africa intervene in the issue by connecting the fragmented situations of Palestinians into the shared reality of apartheid. I investigate how notions of apartheid, Bantustanization, and racial discrimination derived from the South African context are incorporated into everyday Palestinian experiences. In so doing, I argue that comparisons reach through to the core of the formation of the political issue of Palestine.

The second section of this chapter deepens the discussion of Palestinian debates over the meaning and relevance of the comparison with South Africa. While comparisons between apartheid South Africa and apartheid Israel are highly prominent across activist communities and within political arenas, debates arise over whether Palestinians need to loosen the comparative connection to South Africa and formulate their own definition of apartheid, which would correspond more closely to their own experiences of Israeli policies and practices of separation. This section opens up questions of how comparisons travel, and how the grounds of comparison become interrogated and negotiated elsewhere.

The third section discusses the Indigenous comparison between Palestine and Turtle Island. It analyzes the potential of the Indigenous comparison to build upon, fold into, and deepen the organizing around Israeli apartheid. Yet, it also takes a close look at debates over the meaning of Indigeneity in the Palestinian context, which cannot be mapped easily onto the history of Indigenous people elsewhere. I discuss ongoing contestations over how Indigeneity is and can be defined, and how it is used in different ways, for example by the Bedouin in the Naqab desert. This lays bare wider debates over the political versus the primordial-cultural understanding of Indigeneity, and how these understandings project different possible futures for

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<sup>8</sup> Muhamma Amara, "Language, identity and conflict: Examining collective identity through the labels of the Palestinians in Israel," *Journal of Holy Land and Palestine Studies* 15, no. 2 (2016): 203-223; As' ad Ghanem, "The Palestinians in Israel: Political orientation and aspirations," *International Journal of Intercultural Relations* 26, no. 2 (2002): 135-152.

<sup>9</sup> While the borders of historical Palestine have shifted throughout history, it usually encompasses at least the historical territory of Mandate Palestine.

Palestinians. Through the analysis in this section, I show the potential of comparison to push the boundaries of how the issue of Palestine can be seen and acted upon.

The fourth section of this chapter discusses how Ireland has become removed from the comparative stage in Palestine. While Ireland is envisioned as close to Palestine in terms of mutual support, it is only tangentially relevant to Palestine liberation movements in making comparative connections. In this section, I discuss some of the ways in which the comparison with Ireland has been used, most importantly in discussing the fates and tactics of political prisoners back in the day, and the strategy of political negotiation for the Palestinian leadership. I then explore why the comparison is less prominent, discussing multiple potential reasons, including the particular role of Europe. In so doing, I discuss the limits of international comparison, or more specifically, which situations might be taken as too uncomfortable or painful to be drawn into comparison.

The fifth and final section brings together insights into how the issue of Palestine is composed in and through comparison. I pay particular attention to the differences that emerge in the crafting of comparability with Ireland, South Africa, and Turtle Island. By focusing on the situation in Gaza, I reflect on the productive friction between similarity and difference, but also between translatability and untranslatability at the core of Palestinian comparability. I discuss that which gets lost in comparative translation, as comparisons between Palestine on the one hand and Ireland, South Africa, and Turtle Island on the other are incorporated into the very stuff of international relations.

### **1. The Apartheid Analogy: Establishing Everyday Comparability**

In Palestine, conversations about comparison quickly turn to South Africa, or more specifically, the apartheid analogy. Over the past two decades, the apartheid analogy has become the main paradigm in activism for Palestine, first among some small circles of organizers, and nowadays among the majority of Palestinians. This section discusses how the apartheid analogy rose to prominence among Palestinians and how the issue of Palestine is crafted *as* an apartheid issue in and through comparison. I examine how the perceived parallels with South Africa have impacted Palestinian politics and how notions of apartheid, Bantustanization, and racial discrimination derived from the South African context are incorporated into everyday Palestinian experiences.

While the comparison between South Africa and Palestine has only become widespread in recent decades, it was not entirely new. As I discussed in Chapter 5, comparisons had arisen in Palestinian political discourse and scholarship as early as the mid-1970s as a result of linkages between the African National Congress (ANC) and the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) and had become more widespread in the 1990s when Israeli philosophies of separateness were articulated. Yet, it was only after the Oslo process that it came to be mobilized widely and explicitly by Palestinians in their struggle for liberation.<sup>10</sup> Where the Oslo process had been built on the promise of a two-state solution, it was becoming painfully clear as time went on that the reality for Palestinians would be very different.

For most Palestinians, including Issa, an activist now in his fifties, the Oslo process had been a hopeful time. Having been arrested multiple times during the First *Intifada* (1987-1993), Issa remembers the profound change he witnessed in the West Bank in the nineties: “We started

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<sup>10</sup> Nathan Thrall, "BDS: How a controversial non-violent movement has transformed the Israeli-Palestinian debate," *The Guardian*, 14 August 2018, <https://www.theguardian.com/news/2018/aug/14/bds-boycott-divestment-sanctions-movement-transformed-israeli-palestinian-debate>.



to throw olive branches instead of stones on the [Israeli] military jeeps when they were getting out of the Palestinian cities!”<sup>11</sup> As the newly established Palestinian Authority (PA) took force, Issa even took up a job in its police force, wanting to support the entity that would come to rule the Palestinian state. Yet, over time, as he described: “I saw the [Israeli] settlements becoming bigger day by day, week by week. And I saw that they replaced the temporary caravans with villas, with concrete buildings, and there were no signs that the occupation will end.”<sup>12</sup> Issa’s hope was starting to fade, as he began to doubt whether Israel would ever acknowledge the Palestinian state, withdraw its troops and halt land expropriation by settlers. On top of that, he realized that the PA was actively involved in aiding and entrenching the Israeli structures of power, betraying the promise of Palestinian state. Ultimately, Issa felt compelled to resign from the PA police force and return to the streets to protest. When the Second *Intifada* (2000-2005) broke out, Issa was hit by an exploding bullet, which cut his spinal cord and left him in a wheelchair.

It was during the Second *Intifada* that the apartheid analogy gained ground. Prior to this period, apartheid comparisons had been limited to the upper echelons of Palestinian society, where the South African case was used for inspiration in political strategizing. When I talked to Ghassan, a prominent Palestinian organizer and Nobel Peace Prize nominee in his sixties, he recalled that comparisons between Palestine and other instances of political contestation used to be discussed among intellectuals only.<sup>13</sup> This has changed in the past decades, Ghassan told me: “Nowadays even ordinary people are talking about South Africa.”<sup>14</sup> As the Second *Intifada* escalated and the situation in Palestine became more dire, international campaigns of solidarity emerged, including the one started at the 2001 World Conference Against Racism in Durban, South Africa, discussed in Chapter 5, where a wide coalition of protestors and organizers deemed Israel an apartheid state.

Jamal, a key organizer against Israeli apartheid in his sixties, remembers Durban as a decisive moment in the creation of the apartheid comparison. A few months later, he recalled, the comparison was put into everyday practice by Palestinian farmers, paving the way for its wider prominence in Palestinian society. In 2002, Israel had started building the structure that would fence off the West Bank, encroach into Palestinian territory, separate Palestinians on both sides, and cut Palestinian farmers off from their land.<sup>15</sup> In response, farmers and other organizers, including Jamal, joined up to start a campaign called Stop the Wall. It was during the first meeting, he told me, that some farmers identified this as “an apartheid [situation].” “They’re isolating us from our land, villages from each other, and families from each other,” the farmers had said.<sup>16</sup> Consequently, the farmers started calling the structure the “Apartheid Wall,” and other activists followed suit. “We adopted the analysis of the people,” Jamal told me, “and that wasn’t easy at that time.”<sup>17</sup> The response to this apartheid analogy from the Palestinian leadership and prominent NGOs was dismissive: “Everybody was against us,” Jamal said.<sup>18</sup> “What you are talking about is special for South Africa. This is not apartheid. You can’t call it apartheid.”<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Digital interview with Issa Souf from Hares by author, 18 November 2022.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> Ghassan was nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize for his role in cofounding the International Solidarity Movement and the Palestinian Center for Rapprochement between Peoples.

<sup>14</sup> Digital interview with Ghassan Andoni from Beit Sahour by author, 23 December 2022.

<sup>15</sup> Maia Hallward, *Transnational Activism and the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict*, 27; Darweish and Rigby, *Popular Protest in Palestine*, 53.

<sup>16</sup> Digital interview with Jamal Juma’ from Jerusalem by author, 10 January 2023.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

This started changing dramatically from 2005 onwards, when Stop the Wall organizers joined forces with other Palestinian organizations to launch the South Africa-inspired Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions call. In 2007, the Palestinian BDS National Committee was formed, laying the groundwork for the international BDS movement. Jamal remembers how this idea had emerged in response to early criticisms:

They were telling me to argue with me: Who is your ANC? If you want to call for BDS or something like this, you need the ANC. Where is your ANC? Is it the PLO? Is it the PA? Is it your movement? Is it a political party? Which are legitimate questions. And from there it started the discussion internally.<sup>20</sup>

Jamal and the other organizers spent a year discussing these questions, devising a strategy, and mobilizing around it before they launched the call. Palestinians had deployed boycott tactics since the early days of Zionism, and divestment campaigns and calls for sanctions had also already been present.<sup>21</sup> Yet, these tactics were given renewed impetus through the BDS call, as it became explicitly built upon the comparative connection to South Africa.

The hope of the international BDS movement was that activists that had “cut their teeth on the South African anti-apartheid struggle” would now “[shift] their energies to Palestine.”<sup>22</sup> While the Palestinian leadership continued collaborating with Israel and held on to the two-state narrative, BDS activists emphasized the lack of Palestinian autonomy.<sup>23</sup> How could a Palestinian state come into being if Palestinian communities were segregated from each other, and encircled by checkpoints and walls? On top of that, Palestinians continuously face discrimination and repression, even if they hold Israeli citizenship (in fact, recent legislation has made it possible to strip Palestinians of their citizenship or residency).<sup>24</sup> Challenging the narrative of the Palestinian leadership, BDS activists called upon international audiences, predominantly those with governments in alliance with Israel, to open their eyes to the one-state reality on the ground, and the system of segregation that was expanding day by day.

In intellectual circles, it had long been thought that shifting towards an apartheid paradigm could have the potential to “help set in motion a process that could ultimately circumvent or dislodge the apparently ‘immovable object’ of unconditional U.S. support for Israel.”<sup>25</sup> While Israeli expansionism violates the Oslo Accords and is illegal under international law, no repercussions have followed to date, due to the widespread support for Israel among governments in the Global North. As David Lloyd has argued, this can be explained through Israel’s simultaneous normalization and exceptionalism in the international sphere, Israel is on the one hand accepted as an integral part of the so-called international community, whereas on the other hand, it seeks to be excepted from the norms of international law “on the basis of its peculiar destiny as a state in which ethnic nationalism and religious prophecy are enshrined and

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> For the history of Palestinian boycotts, see: Abdel Razzaq Takriti, "Before BDS: Lineages of Boycott in Palestine," *Radical History Review* 2019, no. 134 (2019): 58-95.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 83.

<sup>23</sup> The BDS movement “does not advocate for a particular solution to the conflict and does not call for either a ‘one state solution’ or a ‘two state solution’” *BDS Movement*, “FAQs,” accessed 10 January 2023, <https://bdsmovement.net/faqs>.

<sup>24</sup> *The Guardian*, “Israel votes to strip citizenship from Arabs convicted of terrorism,” 16 February 2013,

<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/feb/16/israel-votes-to-strip-citizenship-from-arabs-convicted-of-terrorism>.

<sup>25</sup> Mark Marshall, "Rethinking the Palestine question: The apartheid paradigm," *Journal of Palestine Studies* 25, no. 1 (1995): 15-22.

which is called on to defend.”<sup>26</sup> In the Global North, this tension is often embedded within discourses that position Israel as a critical ally in the Middle East.

As this simultaneous exceptionalism and normalization was uncritically accepted in most international discourses, the Hebrew term for Israeli policies of separation, *havrada*, “[failed] to arouse significant indignation and intervention.”<sup>27</sup> In international discourses, the discrimination and segregation Palestinians experienced was often attributed to religio-cultural differences and cast in terms of Israel’s need for security.<sup>28</sup> For Palestinians, the apartheid analogy formed a primary way of de-exceptionalizing this situation, as “likening Israel with apartheid familiarizes it.”<sup>29</sup> At the same time, drawing on the symbolic reservoir of the South African case was also intended to be catastrophic, in that the aim was to show the Israeli system in a different light and thereby induce sentiments of outrage. Adopting this term “was appealing to activist Palestinians and their supporters precisely because it provided a ready-made, highly symbolic, globally resonant term that also captured their daily lives under occupation and separation.”<sup>30</sup> The overwhelming international condemnation of apartheid in South Africa, eventually also by the United States, would mean that similar policies of separation by Israel should incite the same kind of outrage, outrage that should lead to a withdrawal of international support for the Israeli apartheid regime. If not, this would expose the existence of double standards in the so-called international community.<sup>31</sup>

The use of the apartheid comparison also intervened in the ontology of the issue for Palestinians and their supporters. While the main focal point for the Palestinian leadership in the wake of Oslo had been opposing the Israeli military occupation, the comparison showed the occupation to be only one manifestation of the broader system of apartheid. The lack of equal access to roads, resources and territory in the West Bank, the deprivation and immobility in Gaza, the checkpoints and walls in Jerusalem, the forced removal and discrimination of Palestinians with Israeli-citizenship in 48, and the exile of Palestinians in the diaspora could all be identified as instances of apartheid.<sup>32</sup> For Palestinians and their supporters, the apartheid comparison connected these realities and thereby changed the perception of what kind of situation they were dealing with. Whereas the Oslo process had fragmented Palestinians in these different places and sharpened divisions between them, the apartheid comparison reunited their disparate struggles into a common fight against a single, discriminatory regime.<sup>33</sup> The BDS campaign could bring the multiple realities of Palestinians together by demanding not only the end of the military occupation, but also the equality of Palestinians with Israeli citizenship and the right of return for Palestinian refugees.<sup>34</sup>

As BDS grew in prominence, comparisons with South Africa became common topics of conversation in wider society. This constituted a challenge for the Palestinian leadership. While the leadership maintained its role as a governmental entity and stuck to the promise of two states,

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<sup>26</sup> David Lloyd, "Settler colonialism and the state of exception: The example of Palestine/Israel," *Settler Colonial Studies* 2, no. 1 (2012): 65.

<sup>27</sup> Peteet, "The Work of Comparison," 261.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> Julie Peteet, "Wall talk: Palestinian graffiti," in *Routledge Handbook of Graffiti and Street Art*, ed. Danwill D. Schwendler (London: Routledge, 2016), pp. 339.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> Barghouti, *BDS*; Stephen Zunes, "Reflections on BDS," *Tikkun* 33, no. 4 (2018).

<sup>32</sup> Thrall, "BDS."

<sup>33</sup> Qumsiyeh, *Popular Resistance in Palestine*, 164.

<sup>34</sup> *BDS Movement*, "What is BDS?" accessed 6 January 2023, <https://bdsmovement.net/what-is-bds>.

the apartheid comparison uncovered the PA's "game of deception" and "illusion of impending peace."<sup>35</sup> The PA was not working towards a peaceful resolution and the creation of a Palestinian state but was only further entrenching the Israeli discriminatory regime through its cooperation. Even the rationale behind the two-state solution itself could be seen as discriminatory, as it was intended to safeguard a Jewish ethnic minority within 48.<sup>36</sup> Over time, the BDS movement "effectively won the argument inside Palestine."<sup>37</sup> In recent years, even the Palestinian leadership has come to adopt the language of apartheid. As Jamal explained: "[Their language] has changed because the PA is bankrupt. They don't have an argument to say to the people anymore."<sup>38</sup> BDS, by contrast, "is the most respected movement in Palestine: it's transparent, it's honest, it's clear."<sup>39</sup> The PA needed to adapt to continue its claim as a representational entity.

The comparison with South Africa thus fundamentally transformed how Palestinians perceive, describe, and act upon their reality in an everyday sense. While the Israeli term for separation, *hafrada*, can be interpreted as based on cultural or religious differences, the term apartheid immediately conjures up connotations of race. This is similarly so in Palestine, where apartheid is translated as "racial separation" (*al-fasl al-unsuri*) or "racial discrimination" (*al-tamyiz al-unsuri*). Whereas apartheid in South Africa was clearly based on the race-based distinction between people designated as Black, White, and Colored, the identities mobilized in the context of Palestine are those of Palestinian and Israeli, or Arab and Jew.<sup>40</sup> In other words, the politically salient distinctions between people are not necessarily construed on a racial, but on an ethnic-national and ethno-religious basis. Yet, through the global resonance that apartheid has, especially within the current era of racial justice movements, the discrimination Palestinians face is increasingly included under the rubric of racism.<sup>41</sup>

This focus on racial discrimination has become ingrained into everyday language in Palestine. The direct translation for the "Apartheid Wall" that is used is the "Racist Separation Wall" (*jidar al-fasl al-unsuri*). For Palestinians, this is a fundamental assertion of what the structure is and does. While the structure is called the "Separation Barrier" within United Nations rhetoric, this name enforces a two-state narrative, and does not capture the primary discriminatory purpose of the wall, which is to keep Palestinians out. The apartheid comparison underlines that the construction of the wall emerges out of racial discrimination in Israel, whereas the wall itself, as Amahl Bishara argues, "can palpably intensify [this] racism."<sup>42</sup> For Palestinians, the comparison with South Africa is constitutive, in that it allows them to see how "the Wall literally cements the existence of segregated reserves and ghettos for Palestinians" mirroring "the structure used by the South African apartheid regime to relegate the Black population into unsustainable, segregated areas."<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> Yiftachel, "Neither two states nor one," 128.

<sup>36</sup> Lana Tatour, "Citizenship as Domination: Settled Colonialism and the Making of Palestinian Citizenship in Israel," *Arab Studies Journal* 27, no. 2 (2019): 8–39.

<sup>37</sup> Thrall, "BDS."

<sup>38</sup> Digital interview with Jamal Juma' from Jerusalem by author, 10 January 2023.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

<sup>40</sup> Supporters of Israel often insist on the term "Arab," despite the fact that the majority of this group in Israel self-identifies as Palestinian, according to Sherry Lowrance, "Identity, grievances, and political action: recent evidence from the Palestinian community in Israel," *International Political Science Review* 27, no. 2 (2006): 167–190.

<sup>41</sup> E.g., Ronit Lentin, "Palestinian Lives Matter: Racialising Israeli Settler-Colonialism," *Journal of Holy Land and Palestine Studies* 19, no. 2 (2020): 133–149; Bill V. Mullen, "The Palestinian BDS Movement as a global antiracist campaign," *Interface: A Journal on Social Movements* 13, no. 2 (2021): 312–322.

<sup>42</sup> Amahl Bishara, "Mobilizing Resistance: Israel's Racist Walls of Separation," *Anthropology Now* 9, no. 3 (2017): 38.

<sup>43</sup> *Stop the Wall*, "The Wall," accessed 2 January 2023, <https://stopthewall.org/the-wall/>.

The comparison has thereby come to illuminate the emergence of segregated Palestinian enclaves, which are, through comparison with the South African case, also called “Bantustans.”<sup>44</sup> It is argued that after the Oslo process, “the West Bank and Gaza Strip have moved towards a process of ‘Bantustanization’ rather than of sovereign independence.”<sup>45</sup> The Oslo process had “fragmented the occupied territories into an archipelago of isolated Palestinian enclaves separated by Israeli controlled territory.”<sup>46</sup> While Gazans have been effectively sealed off since the Israeli siege, the West Bank was divided up into discontinuous areas under the Oslo Accords.<sup>47</sup> Settlement expansion and the construction of Israeli-only bypass roads has further fragmented these areas. As a result, the Palestinian autonomous areas in the West Bank have become “small disconnected islands, 165 of them, each surrounded by a sea of territory under Israeli control,” within which “Israel confiscated land for settlement, demolished Palestinian buildings and provided financial incentives for the settler population to grow.”<sup>48</sup> The containment of Palestinians within those closed off areas is widely seen as predicated on the same idea as the Black Bantustans of South Africa, namely the concentration of the undesirable population within non-contiguous enclaves in an area as small as possible. As Issa told me: “It’s the same model, it’s a copy paste of [the South Africa] model.”<sup>49</sup>

While the status of the Bantustans in South Africa changed over time, and between different territories, they were generally able to operate a police force, but they were not autonomous in terms of their economy and security.<sup>50</sup> Similarly, the PA handles civilian matters while Israel controls its “borders, security, trade, taxation, currency, and the civil registry.”<sup>51</sup> Due to this lack of autonomy, even the differences in Bantustanization between South Africa and Palestine, especially in terms of labor exploitation, have not led to vastly divergent outcomes.<sup>52</sup> While South Africa continuously exploited Black bodies as a source of surplus labor, Israel shifted its strategy over time from using Palestinians for low-paid, menial work to attracting an overseas workforce.<sup>53</sup> From the 1990s, Israel has restricted Palestinian labor and population movement without providing the scope for Palestinian economic independence.<sup>54</sup> Therefore, Palestinians still remain dependent on Israel in terms of their basic living conditions. While Gazans experience permanent food, water, medicine, and electricity shortages, West Bank residents see stark differences in their access to material resources compared to Israeli settlers. For example, Palestinian organizations speak of “water apartheid” and “environmental apartheid” to describe how Israel restricts Palestinian access to water by diverting West Bank water sources to settlements.<sup>55</sup> To Palestinians, this resonates with the lack of autonomy and stark differences in material welfare in South African Bantustans.

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<sup>44</sup> The term “Bantustan” was already used in the Palestinian context prior to the 2005 launch of the BDS call but has become more prominent in political discourse.

<sup>45</sup> Farsakh, “Independence, cantons, or bantustans,” 231.

<sup>46</sup> Clarno, *Neoliberal Apartheid*, 89.

<sup>47</sup> Under the Oslo Accords, the West Bank was divided up into area A (18%) under full Palestinian control, area B (21%) under joint security control with Israel, and area C (61%) being subject to near exclusive Israeli control.

<sup>48</sup> Thrall, “BDS.”

<sup>49</sup> Digital interview with Issa Souf from Hares by author, 18 November 2022.

<sup>50</sup> Farsakh, “Independence, cantons, or bantustans.”

<sup>51</sup> Peteet, “The Work of Comparison,” 268.

<sup>52</sup> Ran Greenstein, “Israel, the Apartheid Analogy and the Labor Question,” in *Apartheid Israel: The Politics of an Analogy*, ed. Sean Jacobs and Jon Soske (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2015): 27-42.

<sup>53</sup> Peteet, “The Work of Comparison,” 274.

<sup>54</sup> Farsakh, “Independence, cantons, or bantustans,” 236.

<sup>55</sup> *Al-Haq*, “Water for One People Only: Discriminatory Access and Water Apartheid in the OPT,” March 2013, [https://www.alhaq.org/cached\\_uploads/download/alhaq\\_files/publications/Water-For-One-People-Only.pdf](https://www.alhaq.org/cached_uploads/download/alhaq_files/publications/Water-For-One-People-Only.pdf); *Institute for Middle*

In these various ways, the experiences and terminologies of apartheid, Bantustanization, and racial discrimination derived from the South African context have become embedded in everyday speech in Palestine to describe the unfolding reality post-Oslo. Comparisons with apartheid South Africa have become “mainstream,” and are now thoroughly shaping Palestinian and international understandings of the predicament of Palestinians.<sup>56</sup> More fundamentally, apartheid comparisons intervene in the ontology of the issue of Palestine by connecting the fragmented situations of Palestinians into a shared and actionable reality. In so doing, acts of comparison incorporate these experiences as a constitutive part of the issue of Palestine *as* an apartheid issue. In the following section, I deepen the analysis by showing how South African understandings of apartheid are negotiated and reworked within the Palestinian context.

## 2. Apartheid Israel: Modifying the Grounds of Comparison

The previous section showed how apartheid comparisons have become used to de-exceptionalize Israeli policies of separation and have come to intervene into the everyday experiences of racial segregation and Bantustanization among Palestinians. Comparisons with South Africa also contribute to the crafting of the issue of Palestine *as* an apartheid issue. Whereas I presented this comparative intervention as somewhat of a tidy story, the transformation brought about by acts of comparison between South Africa and Palestine has been fractured and multidimensional. As I show in this section, Palestinians are interrogating and negotiating the grounds of the apartheid comparison and the specificities of the South African context. They speak back to South African experiences by modifying the meaning and significance of apartheid itself.

While I have thus far presented the apartheid paradigm in Palestine organizing as directly connected to the South African case, not everyone in Palestine necessarily sees it that way. Within Palestine the apartheid comparison is not only used as a provocative analogy, but also as a more generalized legal claim. When I spoke to Tamar, a young Israeli BDS activist based in the West Bank, she argued that Israeli apartheid could be taken on its own terms, unconnected to the South African case, based on the legal definition of the crime of apartheid:

[The case of South Africa] is irrelevant actually because while [the Apartheid Convention] was created as a response to South African apartheid, the specific case doesn't actually matter, because the law is right there. While it helps to know the South African case - it's instructive to, you know, learn history - you can just look at the law.<sup>57</sup>

Similarly, the BDS movement states that:

The validity of the apartheid analysis of Israel's regime over the Palestinian people does not depend on similarities between Israeli policies and South Africa under apartheid. Israel's oppression of Palestinians meets the definition of the crime of Apartheid that is set out by the 2002 Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court.<sup>58</sup>

It is this legal definition that has increasingly become used by Palestinian NGOs to press for the investigation and prosecution of Israeli apartheid.

Initially, the definition of the crime of apartheid under international law was based on the South African experience of apartheid. When the Apartheid Convention was established in 1973,

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*East Understanding*, “Environmental Apartheid in Palestine,” 3 November 2022, <https://imeu.org/article/environmental-apartheid-in-palestine>.

<sup>56</sup> Digital interview with Mahmoud Nawajaa from Ramallah by author, 16 November 2022.

<sup>57</sup> Interview with Tamar [pseudonym] in Ramallah by author, 29 April 2019.

<sup>58</sup> *BDS Movement*, “Israeli Settler Colonialism and Apartheid: Summary,” accessed 12 January 2023, <https://bdsmovement.net/colonialism-and-apartheid/summary>.

it was defined that apartheid “shall include similar policies and practices of racial segregation and discrimination as practised in southern Africa.”<sup>59</sup> Further paragraphs of the Convention listed these policies and practices of racial segregation and discrimination, including bodily and mental harm and the denial of rights. A few decades later, after the end of formal apartheid in Southern Africa, apartheid was redefined in the 2002 Rome Statute. While the definition closely resembled the initial text of the Apartheid Convention, it no longer contained explicit references to Southern Africa, as apartheid simply referred to inhumane acts “committed in the context of an institutionalized regime of systematic oppression and domination by one racial group over any other racial group or groups and committed with the intention of maintaining that regime.”<sup>60</sup>

Yet, even when the South African case is no longer present in the legal definition, the comparison is implicitly there in the symbolic reservoir of the term, as well as in the identification of what apartheid in another context, such as Palestine, would look like. For Palestinian organizers, this resonance with South Africa provides both a rationale for using the term and a potential downside. This is because the symbolic reservoir of apartheid might not map directly onto visions of Palestinian liberation. In the South African understanding, after all, apartheid is defined primarily as a domestic issue, in that it “concerns the access of subjects of a given state to resources and rights as members of that state.”<sup>61</sup> Mahmoud, a young, ingenious organizer who serves as the general coordinator of the BDS committee in Palestine, specified the difference, by stating that “the Palestinian struggle is not just a civil rights movement. I mean it is for Palestinians who live in Israel and have Israeli citizenship: Palestinians who live in 1948 under this regime of apartheid, but it's also about self-determination.”<sup>62</sup> To Mahmoud, the comparison with South Africa is instructive to illuminate the experiences of Palestinians but is also potentially limiting if it is interpreted as a struggle for civil rights.

At the same time, Mahmoud underlined that to him, this does not mean that the notion of apartheid does not apply to Palestinians elsewhere. Rather, it might mean that the comparison to South Africa only goes so far. Within conversations on the apartheid comparison in Palestine, Mahmoud said, “there is confusion whether we call ourselves the same as apartheid South Africa or if apartheid in the Palestinian context is different.”<sup>63</sup> As he continued,

What do we mean by apartheid in Palestine? Because there's no way we can say apartheid without settler colonialism and military occupation.<sup>64</sup> That will make no sense for Palestinians because if we are calling Israel just an apartheid regime, this means that we want our civil rights of equality. Equality with illegal settlers in an illegal settlement on ethnically cleansed Palestinian land, which doesn't make sense. It's really different than South Africa.<sup>65</sup>

Because of these differences, there is increasing awareness of the need for critical assessment of how well the definition of apartheid captures what apartheid looks like in Palestine.

For this reason, Mahmoud and other key organizers across Palestine are working on the establishment of a joint Palestinian definition of apartheid, which encompasses a wider variety of

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<sup>59</sup> UN General Assembly, *Status of the International Convention on the Suppression and Punishment of the Crime of Apartheid*, 13 December 1976, A/RES/31/80, <https://www.refworld.org/docid/3b00f0382c.html>.

<sup>60</sup> UN General Assembly, *Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court (last amended 2010)*, 17 July 1998, <https://www.refworld.org/docid/3ae6b3a84.html>.

<sup>61</sup> Rifkin, “Indigeneity, Apartheid, Palestine,” 26.

<sup>62</sup> Digital interview with Mahmoud Nawajaa from Ramallah by author, 16 November 2022.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid.

<sup>64</sup> While the South African apartheid regime also emerged out of a history of settler colonialism, settler activity in Palestine is still ongoing.

<sup>65</sup> Digital interview with Mahmoud Nawajaa from Ramallah by author, 16 November 2022.

apartheid experiences.<sup>66</sup> At the moment of writing, the Palestinian definition was still underway. The creation of a new definition of apartheid is not necessarily intended to cut Palestine loose from the comparative association with South Africa, as the symbolic reservoir of South Africa is evoked immediately through the use of the term, but rather to reconstitute the grounds of the apartheid comparison through the additional experiences of Palestinians. Through this process of redefining, Palestinian organizers assert agency in how their situation should be understood, mobilizing but also transforming apartheid as an internationally resonant term. As the notion of apartheid travels to Palestine, its meaning becomes interrogated, negotiated, and reworked. In this way, comparison functions not as a singularizing act between static, fixed contexts, but as something that is relationally recast and redefined, creatively and catastrophically redefining that which is drawn into comparison.

Some elements of the South African apartheid experience will become less prominent in this Palestinian definition, whereas new elements are highlighted. Based on the BDS demands, we can expect that the definition of apartheid in the Palestinian context will incorporate the military occupation and the walls and barriers that enclose the populations of the Occupied Territories. “South Africa, unlike Israel, did not build physical walls, nor institute separate road networks or license plates to support its segregationist system,” so any Palestinian definition that covers these practices of separation will add new elements to the understanding of apartheid.<sup>67</sup> Through the creative reworking of the apartheid comparison in Palestine, the salient features of similarity and difference between both contexts will be transformed.

The Palestinian apartheid definition is also likely to include the experiences of the diaspora. It is estimated that about half of the Palestinian population lives outside Palestine while many more Palestinians, including most Gaza residents, are refugees that were displaced from other parts of Palestine.<sup>68</sup> While all people of Jewish descent who immigrate to Israel under the Law of Return can become Israeli citizens, Palestinian refugees are not allowed to return to the places from which they were expelled by Israel. When Palestinians submit requests to convert to Judaism – a legitimate pathway towards Israeli citizenship for foreigners – they are immediately rejected by the Israeli Conversion Authority based on their ethnicity.<sup>69</sup> Through this system of discrimination, Israel attempts to maintain its demographic majority, similar to how Black residents of Bantustans lost their South African citizenship and voting rights in apartheid South Africa.<sup>70</sup> While Black people still resided within the territorial boundaries of South Africa, however, Palestinians have been scattered across the world unable to return due to ethnic discrimination, a distinct situation that undoubtedly warrants inclusion into a Palestinian definition of apartheid.

While the outcome of this process of redefining remains to be seen, there are other ways in which the comparison with South Africa is challenged and transformed based on concerns in Palestine. Mühanned, a young organizer at Youth Against Settlements (YAS), a nonviolent direct-action group in the West Bank, suggested another mode of comparison, one that echoes present-

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<sup>66</sup> Ibid.

<sup>67</sup> Peteet, “The Work of Comparison,” 274.

<sup>68</sup> During the 2018-2019 Great March of Return in Gaza, protestors demanded that Palestinians must be granted the right to return to the lands from which they were displaced by Israel. For more: Jihad Abusalim, “The Great March of Return: An Organizer’s Perspective,” *Journal of Palestine Studies* 47, no. 4 (2018): 90-100.

<sup>69</sup> *The Jerusalem Post*, “Palestinian requests to convert to Judaism rejected automatically,” 1 April 2016, <https://www.jpost.com/arab-israeli-conflict/palestinian-requests-to-convert-to-judaism-rejected-automatically-449987>.

<sup>70</sup> Lana Tatour, “Citizenship as Domination,” 8–39.



day South African concerns. Just as the corruption of the ANC government has become an extreme source of frustration for South Africans, so have most Palestinians become deeply disillusioned with the PA, Mühanned proclaimed. Not only is the Palestinian leadership complicit in Israeli oppression of Palestinians, but PA-rule has also been characterized by widespread corruption, or what Tariq Dana has identified as “crony capitalism,” a system whereby political-business actors use political power to serve the narrow interests of the elite and ensure social control.<sup>71</sup> In Palestine, this system is “part of the political allegiances and economic alliances that underpin the structures created by the Oslo process.”<sup>72</sup> For Mühanned, the privileges awarded to some Palestinians under this system are highly comparable to the Black political elite in South Africa, which has betrayed the promise of post-apartheid equality for self-enrichment by maintaining the structures of economic disenfranchisement.

This emergent mode of comparing brings us back to the ruins of apartheid in present-day South Africa. Many Palestinians I encountered were aware of the continuation of racial discrimination and inequality after the end of formal apartheid. Just as Black elites have escaped the townships but left the structures of inequality intact, Mühanned described how Palestinian elites have been able to shirk the reality of the occupation.<sup>73</sup> They have done so through Very Important Person (VIP) documentation or Businessman Cards (BMC), which allow them to evade the mobility restrictions that apply to all other Palestinians in the Occupied Territories. “There are people from Gaza and the West Bank who can fly from Ben Gurion!”<sup>74</sup> Mühanned cried out.<sup>75</sup> He told me that Palestinians often joke when they hear someone with these privileges complain about the occupation. “What occupation?” they will say.<sup>76</sup> “You don’t really suffer from it!”<sup>77</sup> Organizers thus identify similarities in how former revolutionary leaders have become complicit in structures of oppression.<sup>78</sup> This mode of comparison is growing in Palestine, evidenced by recent writings and conversations among organizers I spoke to.<sup>79</sup>

At the same time, the comparison between the ANC and the PA does not have the same significance in Palestine as it does in the South African context in the current moment. Whereas this comparison captures the most pressing struggle for South Africans after the end of formal apartheid, the failure of the PA is but one part of the broader architecture of the post-Oslo order in Palestine. The apartheid comparison remains more salient, as it challenges the underlying Israeli strategy of separating and weakening Palestinians, of which the limited authority and corruption of the PA is a prime example.<sup>80</sup> Additionally, interviewees suggested, the situation in

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<sup>71</sup> Tariq Dana, “Crony capitalism in the Palestinian Authority: a deal among friends,” *Third World Quarterly* 41, no. 2 (2020): 247-263.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, 247.

<sup>73</sup> In Chapter 5, we saw how PA representatives maintain close relations with the ANC and underwrite their political narrative.

<sup>74</sup> Ben Gurion Airport is the main international airport in Israel, located in Tel Aviv. Palestinians from the Occupied Territories without privileges are not allowed to use this airport, nor is there an airport in the West Bank and Gaza. Palestinians from the West Bank can fly from Jordan by crossing the border at King Hussein bridge, though in practice this means at least a day extra travelling time, as Palestinians are regularly held up for many hours for interrogation by Israeli authorities.

<sup>75</sup> Digital interview with Mühanned Qafesha from Hebron by author, 25 November 2022.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>78</sup> In Chapter 4, we saw similar arguments being made about the political domestication of Sinn Fein in Ireland, which led to a waning of relationality consciousness. In the future, we might see more comparisons could between how the role of these leaders undermines the collective consciousness of Palestinians, Black South Africans, and the Irish.

<sup>79</sup> E.g., Clarno, *Neoliberal Apartheid*; Loubna Qutami, “Moving Beyond the Apartheid Analogy in Palestine and South Africa,” *MERIP*, 3 February 2020, <https://merip.org/2020/02/moving-beyond-the-apartheid-analogy-in-palestine-and-south-africa-trump/>.

<sup>80</sup> Palestinians emphasized to me that this does not mean that their leaders bear no responsibility for the rampant corruption and democratic failure. In fact, most were highly critical of the leadership, whilst emphasizing that the Oslo architecture created the impossible conditions within which their leaders operate.

Palestine is more multifaceted, as Palestinians additionally face the political split between Fatah, the main party in the PA, and Hamas, which has controlled Gaza since 2007. Targeting the Fatah-dominated PA risks further fragmenting Palestinians along factional lines, which is regarded as detrimental to the Palestinian cause.<sup>81</sup> The strength of the apartheid comparison, by contrast, is precisely that it reunites Palestinians from the West Bank, Gaza, East Jerusalem, 48, and the diaspora in a shared reality, one that has the potential to transcend geographical and factional divisions.

Yet, the particular way in which the apartheid comparison connects and unifies the experiences of Palestinians is also a cause of concern for some. While the BDS movement has been endorsed by nearly all civil society organizations in Palestine, Ali, a prominent activist and leader of the nonviolent movement Taghyeer, expressed hesitation about using the apartheid comparison. “We need to be very careful in comparing,” he said, “because it seems like we are creating another campaign to be affiliated with at the expense of the political force that we need.”<sup>82</sup> While the apartheid comparison has come to be used precisely because it mobilizes the symbolic reservoir of apartheid in South Africa, Ali worries that these sentiments undermine the Palestinian cause in the long run. The apartheid comparison, in his view, risks mobilizing anti-Israel sentiments instead of establishing the conditions for a better outcome for Palestinians.

As the BDS movement grew in prominence, it has indeed come to be regarded as a strategic or existential threat to Israel.<sup>83</sup> Because the movement opposes legally sanctioned discrimination against non-Jews, this can be construed as a threat to Israel’s legitimacy as a Jewish state. The apartheid analogy, as mobilized by BDS, connects discrimination against Palestinians wherever it happens. This means that even if Israel would end its occupation of the West Bank and East Jerusalem and the blockade of Gaza, it would still need to dismantle the apartheid system that exists within its own borders. As Nathan Thrall explains, “a battle against occupation could be concluded with a simple military withdrawal, but a struggle against apartheid could be won only with the end of state policies that discriminated against non-Jews.”<sup>84</sup> The apartheid comparison raises the stakes for Israel and is therefore taken to be threat to the Jewish identity of the Israeli state, inciting strong opposition among its supporters.

The apartheid comparison might not translate into more international support for Palestinians, especially not on a governmental level, Ali warned. “Israel is a very powerful country, and Israel also has so much credibility as the victim through the history of Jewish people.”<sup>85</sup> Therefore, Ali argues for a different strategy, one that underlines the legitimacy of the Israeli state, but that makes this legitimacy conditional on how Israel treats Palestinians: “If Jewish people belong to this land, then what makes their belonging legitimate is their respect to each soul on this land.”<sup>86</sup> Instead of turning Israel into a pariah state by comparing it to apartheid South Africa, he proposes reconciliation, based on another South African model: “The thing that I would love to happen is to have such a person like Mandela in Palestine. That’s what I would love to have from South Africa; Mandela!”<sup>87</sup> Just as Mandela tried to unite Black, Colored, and

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<sup>81</sup> Jacob Hoigilt, “Fatah from below: The clash of generations in Palestine,” *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 43, no. 4 (2016): 461.

<sup>82</sup> Digital interview with Ali Abu Awwad from Beit Ummar by author, 3 January 2023.

<sup>83</sup> Ronnie Olesker, “Delegitimization as a national security threat: Israel and BDS,” *Israel Studies Review* 34, no. 2 (2019): 33-54.

<sup>84</sup> Thrall, “BDS.”

<sup>85</sup> Digital interview with Ali Abu Awwad from Beit Ummar by author, 3 January 2023.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid.

White people across South Africa, Ali goes out to settlements to talk to Israeli settlers. He is well aware that most Palestinians disagree with this practice, as it is considered normalization.

BDS organizers turn this logic on its head, as they see Israel's opposition to the apartheid comparison as a win.<sup>88</sup> The comparison "became mainstream *because of* [Israel's] war launched against BDS," Jamal recalled.<sup>89</sup> The Israeli Ministry of Strategic Affairs made BDS its top priority and started lobbying governments and organizations to adopt the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) definition of antisemitism, which deems "claiming that the State of Israel is a racist endeavor" an antisemitic act.<sup>90</sup> This controversial definition has become used to discredit BDS activities in various countries, such as Germany, the United Kingdom, and the United States.<sup>91</sup> As Jamal indicated, opposition to the antisemitism definition and anti-BDS legislation, including by prominent Jews, has been a challenge for organizers, but has also mainstreamed the apartheid analogy and communicated the demands of the BDS movement to a wider audience.<sup>92</sup>

For most Palestinians, the BDS movement and its mobilization of the apartheid comparison have come to "[represent] something of a last resort."<sup>93</sup> With the promise of negotiations hollowed out after Oslo, they have turned to international audiences to withdraw support for Israel. Yet, as I showed in this section, this is not simply about creating Palestine's "South Africa moment."<sup>94</sup> By negotiating the specificities of the South African context and modifying the meaning and significance of apartheid, Palestinians are reimagining what a successful post-apartheid outcome would look like. The next section further continues the discussion of the modification of the apartheid comparison, as it has become connected to the notion of Palestinian Indigeneity.

### 3. Indigenous Futures: The Original People of Palestine

The previous section showed how Palestinians have started redefining apartheid based on their own experiences and visions for the future. In some ways, this redefinition departs from the specificities of apartheid in the South African context. This has underlined the significance of comparison as a dynamic, relational, and creative act. In this section, I continue this discussion by exploring how Palestinian organizers have started positioning the apartheid comparison within longer histories of settler colonialism. To ground their experience with ongoing colonization, they have come to draw upon notions of Indigeneity, partly through comparisons with Turtle Island. This is how comparisons are folded together and (re)composed into possible future trajectories. Yet, as I show in this section, Indigenous comparisons remain contested, as they are mobilized to work towards multiple – and possibly incompatible – Indigenous futures.

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<sup>88</sup> See also Asa Winstanley, "Repression of the BDS movement is a sure sign of its success," *Middle East Monitor*, 29 November 2018, <https://www.middleeastmonitor.com/20181129-repression-of-the-bds-movement-is-a-sure-sign-of-its-success/>.

<sup>89</sup> Digital interview with Jamal Juma' from Jerusalem by author, 10 January 2023.

<sup>90</sup> *International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance*, "What is antisemitism?" accessed 10 January 2023, <https://www.holocaustremembrance.com/resources/working-definitions-charters/working-definition-antisemitism>.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*; *Al Jazeera*, "Frightening: US appeals court upholds Arkansas anti-BDS law," 22 June 2022, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2022/6/22/frightening-us-appeals-court-upholds-arkansas-anti-bds-law>; *Middle East Monitor*, "Shielding Apartheid Israel, UK to adopt anti-BDS legislation," 11 May 2022, <https://www.middleeastmonitor.com/20220511-shielding-apartheid-israel-uk-to-adopt-anti-bds-legislation/>; *Reuters*, "Germany designates BDS Israel boycott movement as anti-Semitic," 17 May 2019, <https://www.reuters.com/article/uk-germany-bds-israel-idUKKCN1SN1Z3>.

<sup>92</sup> For an assessment of the shift in U.S. public opinion, for example, see Omar Barghouti, "BDS: Nonviolent, Globalized Palestinian Resistance to Israel's Settler Colonialism and Apartheid," *Journal of Palestine Studies* 50, no. 2 (2021): 108-125.

<sup>93</sup> Thrall, "BDS."

<sup>94</sup> Barghouti, *BDS*, 11.

We have seen how Mahmoud, general coordinator of the BDS committee, posited that in Palestine, “there’s no way we can say apartheid without settler colonialism.”<sup>95</sup> While the South African apartheid regime grew out of a long history of Dutch and British settler colonialism, and the apartheid system itself was developed from the colonial imaginaries and practices of these former settlers, there was a temporal gap between the time of colonization and the time of apartheid. In practice, this meant that apartheid could become construed as a phenomenon in its own right, with a historical link to, but yet somewhat separate from this history of settler colonialization. In Palestine, by contrast, practices of colonial land expropriation and practices of apartheid have always coincided. For Palestinian organizers, this means that Israeli apartheid needs to be repositioned in order to connect it to the reality of active, ongoing Israeli settler colonialization.

To strengthen the link between apartheid and settler colonialism, Palestinian organizers have come to expand their comparative vision to settler colonial contexts other than South Africa. This development among organizers is in line with the settler colonial turn in the social sciences, in which Palestine becomes compared to “New World White settler societies” such as Australia, Canada, and the United States.<sup>96</sup> In this literature, the apartheid analogy sometimes becomes transformed, or even substituted by comparative connections to other settler societies.<sup>97</sup> Yet, among Palestinian organizers, the apartheid analogy tends to be sharpened and deepened by connecting it to other settler colonial contexts, rather than substituted by it. When I spoke to BDS organizer Tamar, she put these acts of settler colonial comparison in explicitly stadial terms:

First, we'll get apartheid and once we have apartheid we can - and it's not like it hasn't been discussed before - we can insert colonialism. Once we speak about colonialism, then who are we in this scenario? We're the Indigenous people.<sup>98</sup>

By positioning Palestine within the broader comparative frame of settler colonialization, the apartheid analogy becomes the starting point of a more profound and indeed catastrophic reconstitution of the issue of Palestine within longer and unfolding settler colonial histories.

The innovation in drawing these comparative connections is not in positioning Palestine as an instance of settler colonialism per se, as settler colonialism has shaped Palestinians analyses of the Zionist project since at least the 1920s.<sup>99</sup> From the 1990s, the notion that the Nakba (catastrophe) of settler colonial dispossession was in fact ongoing became in wide use.<sup>100</sup> What is novel, however, is the reconfiguration of the issue of Palestine *as* an Indigenous issue, based on the analogy with New World White settler states and their Indigenous populations.<sup>101</sup> Over the past decades, as described in Chapter 6, Indigenous peoples have become a recognized and valued political agent in international politics, especially in opposition to resource extraction and

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<sup>95</sup> While the South African apartheid regime also emerged out of a history of settler colonialism, settler activity in Palestine is still ongoing.

<sup>96</sup> E.g., Francesco Amoroso, Ilan Pappé, and Sophie Richter-Devroe. "Introduction: Knowledge, power, and the “settler colonial turn” in Palestine studies," *Interventions* 21, no. 4 (2019): 451-463; Barakat, "Writing/righting Palestine studies," Rachel Busbridge, "Israel-Palestine and the settler colonial ‘turn’: From interpretation to decolonization," *Theory, Culture & Society* 35, no. 1 (2018): 91-115.

<sup>97</sup> For substitution, see: Mamdani, "Settler colonialism," 610.

<sup>98</sup> Tamar, an Israeli, does not speak of herself as indigenous but summarizes the views of her Palestinian BDS co-organizers here; Interview with Tamar [pseudonym] in Ramallah by author, 29 April 2019.

<sup>99</sup> Ilan Pappé, "The framing of the question of Palestine by the early Palestinian press: Zionist settler-colonialism and the newspaper Filastin, 1912–1922," *Journal of Holy Land and Palestine Studies* 14, no. 1 (2015): 59-81.

<sup>100</sup> Shir Alon, "No One to See Here: Genres of Neutralization and the Ongoing Nakba," *The Arab Studies Journal* 27, no. 1 (2019): 90-117.

<sup>101</sup> Busbridge, "Israel-Palestine and the settler colonial ‘turn’.

environmental degradation.<sup>102</sup> In describing Palestinians *as* an Indigenous people, the Israel settler colonial project is further de-exceptionalized, as the symbolic reservoir of Indigenous struggles elsewhere becomes mobilized.

Yet, the fact that the concept of Indigeneity emerges from and is deeply entangled with New World settler contexts such as in Turtle Island has important implications for Palestinians. As some of my interlocutors underlined, “Indigeneity” is a term that is not actually *indigenous to Palestine*. As Youth Against Settlements organizer Mühanned stated:

In Palestine we don’t really use this word “Indigenous,” in Arabic at least. We just say we’re the owners of the land: *‘ashab al-‘ard*, but we never use the word “Indigenous.” We use it in English to talk about the [United] States, but we never use it for Palestine.<sup>103</sup>

In Arabic, there is no separate term for “Indigenous,” so the direct translation of the term is “original people” (*al-sukan al-asliyin*). When I spoke to Zainab, an academic at a Palestinian university, she explained that “[the term Indigeneity] is a translation rather than something that is shaped within the context.”<sup>104</sup> Whether it is going to be used in Palestine “needs to be a conversation,” in her view. “Where is it going to take us if we coin an Arabic concept that is parallel to Indigeneity?”<sup>105</sup> She continued: “I don’t think [we] have had that conversation yet. Not in the academy nor among ourselves.”<sup>106</sup>

When I spoke to BDS organizers, I did get the sense that the conversation on Indigeneity was starting to gain ground. In 2008, the BDS National Committee published a position paper that spoke of “Israel’s multifaceted oppression of the indigenous people of Palestine.”<sup>107</sup> In 2011, the language of Indigeneity became used on the BDS website to explain the connection between settler colonialism and apartheid.<sup>108</sup> In 2020, as we have seen in the previous chapter, BDS organizers issued a solidarity statement with Wet’suwet’en protestors, emphasizing that they know “from [their] own experience” how resource extraction is used to solidify control over Indigenous territories.<sup>109</sup> Just like in the case of the notion of apartheid, however, BDS organizers were aware of the need to figure out what Indigeneity means for Palestinians. As BDS coordinator Mahmoud said: “We are using that language, but we need to have more discussion about the use of the Indigenous population in Palestine, because it could lead to something, or it could lead to something else. It depends on the analysis and objectives of using such language.”<sup>110</sup>

The difficulty in using the language of Indigeneity in Palestine, Mahmoud and others emphasized, is that the geographical centrality of Palestine means that the Palestinian experience is very different from more Indigenous histories in Turtle Island and elsewhere. Whether the term “Indigenous” applies to Palestinians “depends on the definition,” Ghassan explained:

If you talk about people who can trace their ancestors to hundreds or years ago, yes. If you talk about the peasants who used to cultivate the land and live in Palestinian villages, yes. But

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<sup>102</sup> Francesca Merlan, “Indigeneity: Global and local,” *Current Anthropology* 50, no. 3 (2009): 303-333.

<sup>103</sup> Digital interview with Mühanned Qafesha from Hebron by author, 25 November 2022.

<sup>104</sup> Digital interview with Zainab [pseudonym] from East Jerusalem by author, 22 November 2022.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid.

<sup>107</sup> *BDS Movement*, “United Against Apartheid, Colonialism and Occupation: Dignity & Justice for the Palestinian People,” 28 November 2008, <https://bdsmovement.net/news/united-against-apartheid-colonialism-and-occupation-dignity-justice-palestinian-people>.

<sup>108</sup> Based on my own analysis of the history of the BDS website, using Wayback Machine.

<sup>109</sup> *BDS Movement*, “Palestinians Stand in Solidarity with the Wet’suwet’en Nation.”

<sup>110</sup> Digital interview with Mahmoud Nawajaa from Ramallah by author, 16 November 2022.

if Indigenous has any other definition, like a pure race of whatever, no. I mean, Palestinians are a multi-racial community originally.<sup>111</sup>

Given that Palestine has been at the center of multiple ancient civilizations and at the crossroads of many historical trade routes, there is no such thing as a particular grouping that has remained on the land “since time immemorial.”<sup>112</sup> Instead, what could be called the Indigenous Palestinian population is an amalgamation of peoples, cultures, and religious groups.

Therefore, the Indigenous comparison put forward by Palestinian organizers at BDS and other organizations depends on a specifically political definition of Indigeneity. As we saw in Chapter 6, such a definition roots Indigeneity not within the authenticity of particular cultural traditions or primordial presence of a historically continuous group but rather describes it as “a political condition that challenges the existence and domination of colonial nation-states.”<sup>113</sup> As Mahmoud argued: “it’s not about who was here before, it’s about settler colonialism.”<sup>114</sup> This is especially pertinent in the Palestinian context, where Israelis often question Palestinian Indigeneity, and present rival indigenous claims, based on historical ties and belonging to the land through Jewish ancestors in past millennia.<sup>115</sup> As Mahmoud argued:

Jewish people have been here like 3,000 years ago. They were here. Most of them left, we stayed. We became Christian and then we became Muslim. We're still here. This doesn't mean that anyone can claim the land coming back after 3,000 years. And even if they come after 3,000 years, we could live together.<sup>116</sup>

The issue, as Mahmoud indicates, is not about whether Israelis are allowed to reside on the land, or whether they have historical ties to it, but about the uprooting of Palestinian society to make space for the Israeli state. Such a political understanding of Indigeneity is powerful because it centralizes a population that has become subjected to colonial domination, sidestepping any quarrels about historical presence.

Based on this political definition, the Indigenous comparison is positioned not as an alternative to, but as a deepening of, the apartheid analogy. Earlier in the chapter, we saw that the apartheid analogy is pivotal in de-exceptionalizing and familiarizing Israeli policies of separation by making them intelligible to wider international audiences. Yet, apartheid is positioned not only as familiar, but also as extraordinary, in that the mobilization of sentiments from the South African context is intended to incite outrage. Grounding South African and Israeli apartheid in a longer and more diverse settler colonial history deepens the understanding of this seeming paradox. Settler colonial projects permanently impose a state of exception, of which policies of apartheid are but one manifestation. As David Lloyd writes: “if Israel is a settler colony, it is indeed exemplary, normal and normative, in almost every respect.”<sup>117</sup> This normalized state of exception has had different manifestations across the world’s settler colonial contexts.

Another manifestation of such a settler colonial state of exception, more in line with the experience of the Indigenous people of Turtle Island, is ethnic cleansing, or more strongly, genocide. As Ghassan explained:

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<sup>111</sup> Digital interview with Ghassan Andoni from Beit Sahour by author, 23 December 2022.

<sup>112</sup> This is the phrasing that tends to be used by indigenous peoples in Turtle Island.

<sup>113</sup> *The Red Nation*, “About.”

<sup>114</sup> Digital interview with Mahmoud Nawajaa from Ramallah by author, 16 November 2022.

<sup>115</sup> E.g., *The Jerusalem Post*, “Debunking the claim that ‘Palestinians’ are the indigenous people of Israel,” 12 May 2015, <https://www.jpost.com/blogs/why-world-opinion-matters/are-arabs-the-indigenous-people-of-palestine-402785>.

<sup>116</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>117</sup> Lloyd, “Settler Colonialism and the State of Exception,” 71.

When we look at what's happening in Palestine, the road is open for all of those options: Transfer, genocide, apartheid. Those are all part of the agenda against Palestinians since the beginning and until now. None of them was excluded from the Zionist agenda. And that's why if you want to look at genocide, one of the examples is what happened to the Native Americans. If you want to look at apartheid, you go and look at what happens in South Africa. ... Sometimes people want to guess what's the nearest option and most people think apartheid right now. I personally think that people are probably true (sic), but you can never exclude transfer and genocide. Those are still open options for any Israeli government to come.<sup>118</sup>

The Indigenous comparison strengthens the apartheid analogy by tracing the more diverse histories of settler colonial projects, and their possible trajectories and outcomes. Since the 2022 Israeli far-right government was installed, fears over these potential other outcomes are rising.<sup>119</sup>

Through these kinds of comparisons, Palestinian experiences become connected to other catastrophic events in Indigenous history, such as ethnic cleansing and genocide.<sup>120</sup> While these terms are commonly used to describe the history of the Indigenous peoples of Turtle Island, they are still contested in the Palestinian context. The term “ethnic cleansing” is now widely used by Palestinians to describe the Nakba, whereby “half of the Indigenous people living in Palestine were driven out, half of their villages and towns were destroyed, and only very few among them ever managed to return.”<sup>121</sup> As Ilan Pappé writes: “When it created its nation-state, the Zionist movement did not wage a war that 'tragically but inevitably' led to the expulsion of 'parts of' the Indigenous population, but the other way round: the main goal was the ethnic cleansing of all of Palestine, which the movement coveted for its new state.”<sup>122</sup> The term is also applied to the ongoing expulsion of Palestinians from East Jerusalem and the West Bank.<sup>123</sup>

The term “genocide” is contentious but also gaining ground. In the Palestinian context, the terms “genocide” and “slow genocide” have been used to describe how Palestinian society is destroyed and the very markers of Palestinian identity erased, for example by speaking of “Arabs” and denying Palestinian history and symbolisms, in line with the forced assimilation of Indigenous peoples in Turtle Island through the residential school system.<sup>124</sup> As Israeli prime minister Golda Meir said: “there were no such thing as Palestinians ... It is not as though there was a Palestinian people in Palestine considering itself as a Palestinian people and we came and threw them out and took their country away from them. They didn't exist.”<sup>125</sup> In this vein, the pockets of land Palestinians still hold become described as reservations rather than Bantustans, in that the eventual goal is not “separate development,” but disappearance, in order to come back to the original Zionist intention of giving “the country without a people to the people without a

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<sup>118</sup> Digital interview with Ghassan Andoni from Beit Sahour by author, 23 December 2022.

<sup>119</sup> *The Times of Israel*, “Palestinians urge world to ‘reject any dealings’ with new Netanyahu government,” 30 December 2022, <https://www.timesofisrael.com/palestinians-urge-world-to-reject-any-dealings-with-new-netanyahu-government/>.

<sup>120</sup> E.g., Haifa Rashed and Damien Short, “Genocide and settler colonialism: can a Lemkin-inspired genocide perspective aid our understanding of the Palestinian situation?” *The International Journal of Human Rights* 16, no. 8 (2012): 1142-1169.

<sup>121</sup> *Ibid.*, 9.

<sup>122</sup> Ilan Pappé, *The Ethnic Cleansing of Palestine* (Oxford, Oneworld Publications, 2006), xvi.

<sup>123</sup> Saad Amira, “The slow violence of Israeli settler-colonialism and the political ecology of ethnic cleansing in the West Bank,” *Settler Colonial Studies* (2021): 1-21; Walid Salem, “Jerusalem: Reconsidering the settler colonial analysis,” *Palestine-Israel Journal of Politics, Economics, and Culture* 21, no. 4 (2016): 21-27.

<sup>124</sup> E.g., Omar Barghouti, “European collusion in Israel's slow genocide,” in *The Plight of the Palestinians: A Long History of Destruction*, ed. W. Cook (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010): 181-184; Daud Abdullah, “A century of cultural genocide in Palestine,” in *Cultural Genocide: Law, Politics, and Global Manifestations*, ed. Jeffrey S. Bachman (London: Routledge, 2019), 227-245.

<sup>125</sup> W. Cook, ed., *The Plight of the Palestinians: a long history of destruction* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 18.

country.”<sup>126</sup> Some organizers also turn to international law with the aim that Israel will not only be tried for the crime of apartheid, but equally for the crime of genocide.<sup>127</sup>

These acts of comparison are catastrophic in a creative sense in that they push the boundaries of how the issue of Palestine is seen and acted upon. Through the comparison with Turtle Island and other New World settler contexts, ethnic cleansing and genocide become seen as constitutive elements of the issue of Palestine. Yet, as the Indigenous comparison is still emerging, these elements also became the basis upon which the comparison can be (partly) rejected. As Sherin, a young activist from Hebron, shared:

When you talk about the Indigenous people in Turtle Island, there is a huge difference between who was there first and who is there now. There is a very small minority [left], whereas in Palestine we are still the majority. ... Jews and Arabs [in historical Palestine] are the same numbers, kind of, but when it comes to Palestinians outside, we are the majority.<sup>128</sup> “They didn't manage to erase us,” Sherin clarified “and I think that's where the comparison fails.”<sup>129</sup> Mühanned voiced similar arguments: “We still have part of the land, that's why we still don't use the term ‘Indigenous’ ... but maybe in the future we'll use it, when it's all Israel.”<sup>130</sup> Just like in Arafat's assessment in the 1980s and early 2000s, the incomplete process of ethnic cleansing and genocide in Palestine becomes grounds upon which the reject the Indigenous comparison.

While these discussions unfold, one group of Palestinians has come to claim Indigeneity on a very different basis. This started a decade or so earlier, when, from the 1990's and 2000's, Palestinians from Bedouin communities in the Naqab desert started using the term “Indigenous” to advocate for land rights and the recognition of their villages.<sup>131</sup> These Bedouin had faced displacement, forced sedentarization and widespread discrimination since they became incorporated into the Israeli state after the Nakba. Bedouin claims to Indigeneity coincided with, and were inspired by, the increasing use and legitimacy of the term in international political arenas. Formal appeal for recognition of Indigenous status were made, led by Negev Coexistence Forum (NCF), an Israeli NGO that supports Bedouin rights. These claims were made based on the “cultural distinctiveness” of the Bedouin the historical “connection to their traditional lands,” and their marginalization and discrimination in Israeli society.<sup>132</sup>

Today, the United Nations, the European Union, and a number of international NGO's refer to the Naqab Bedouin as “Indigenous.”<sup>133</sup> Since 2005, Bedouin activists have been attending the meetings of the UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues and the UN Expert Mechanism on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and delivering statements.<sup>134</sup> Yet, for most Bedouin and

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<sup>126</sup> Diana Muir, “A Land without a People for a People without a Land,” *Middle East Quarterly* 15, no. 2 (2008): 55-62.

<sup>127</sup> Similar to the argument on the crime of apartheid, it can also be argued that the comparison to indigenous genocide in New World settler states is irrelevant for the Palestinian case, as the general criteria under international law suffice.

<sup>128</sup> Digital interview with Sherin Idais from Hebron by author, 14 December 2022.

<sup>129</sup> Ibid.

<sup>130</sup> Digital interview with Mühanned Qafesha from Hebron by author, 25 November 2022.

<sup>131</sup> In Hebrew, the desert is called the “Negev,” but Bedouin organizers have started using the Arabic “Naqab” in the process of reclaiming their indigenous connection to the land.

<sup>132</sup> Lana Tatour, “The culturalisation of indigeneity: the Palestinian-Bedouin of the Naqab and indigenous rights,” *The International Journal of Human Rights* 23, no. 10 (2019): 1569-1741.

<sup>133</sup> E.g., *European Parliament*, “European Parliament Resolution of 5 July 2012 on EU Policy on the West Bank and East Jerusalem,” accessed 17 January 2023, <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?pubRef=-//EP//TEXT+TA+P7-TA-2012-0298+0+DOC+XML+V0//EN&language=EN>.

<sup>134</sup> *Negev Coexistence Forum for Civil Equality*, “UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues,” accessed 17 January 2023, <https://www.dukium.org/un-permanent-forum-indigenous-issues/>.



their allies, Indigeneity is primarily regarded as a strategic tool.<sup>135</sup> “In this case, it’s not so much about Indigeneity in and of itself as about a tool to achieve recognition,” Yael, a NCF employee told me.<sup>136</sup> “[The Bedouin] don’t use the term Indigenous in such a deep way as I hear in the discourse of tribes in North America.”<sup>137</sup> This strategy can work for Bedouin only because they hold Israeli citizenship, which means that “they still have more tools to fight against oppressive measures than us in the West Bank,” Ghassan emphasized.<sup>138</sup> The hope is that Bedouin land rights and equal treatment will be guaranteed by the Israeli state because of the recognition of indigenous status, though at the time of writing, discrimination and displacement continue.<sup>139</sup>

While many of my interlocutors supported the Bedouin in strategically using these tools, this particular interpretation of Indigeneity was often perceived as harmful to the Palestinians as a whole. As Mahmoud indicated: “I’m against dividing Palestinians into an Indigenous and a non-Indigenous population. I mean even the Bedouin – we were all Bedouin before coming to the city!”<sup>140</sup> “Applying the term to some Palestinians (like the Naqab [Bedouin] ...) and not to others” in Julie Peteet’s words, “runs the risk of adding another wedge in the Zionist-imposed categorization of the Palestinians.”<sup>141</sup> Indigeneity, in that sense, could be seen as a form of what Oren Yiftachel has called “divisive classification.”<sup>142</sup> The term potentially awards some groups of Palestinians - depoliticized as Israeli Bedouin or Israeli Arabs - some rights, but only because “settler colonialism and the question of Palestine can be made absent.”<sup>143</sup> This primordial-cultural understanding of Bedouin Indigeneity risks undermining a more political, more decolonial, and more encompassing Palestinian argument for Indigenous liberation.

These divergent uses of the language of Indigeneity are not only stooled on different understandings of what Indigeneity means, but they also put forward different modes of redress. The Bedouin claim to Indigeneity focuses on securing resources and rights within the Israeli state, whilst the political definition of Indigeneity is used in an almost diametrically opposed way, that is, to move beyond civil rights by challenging the legitimacy of the Israeli settler colonial project. These claims represent different future trajectories, with the latter opening up more difficult debates over the issue of Palestine as an instance of settler colonial genocide. The next section of this chapter continues the discussion on Palestine as a settler colonial issue, by zooming in on the neglected comparison with Ireland.

#### 4. Echoes of Ireland: Confronting Colonial Europe

So far in this chapter, we have seen how the issue of Palestine is composed as an apartheid issue and Indigenous issue in and through acts of comparison. Through comparisons, the issue of Palestine is de-exceptionalized as part of a longer settler colonial history. We have also seen how these colonial comparisons are folded together and (re)composed into possible political futures for Palestine. While the contexts of South Africa and Turtle Island have been drawn into the

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<sup>135</sup> Oren Yiftachel, Batya Roded, and Alexandre Kedar, “Between rights and denials: Bedouin indigeneity in the Negev/Naqab,” *Environment and Planning A: Economy and Space* 48, no. 11 (2016): 2129-2161.

<sup>136</sup> Interview with Eda [pseudonym] in Beersheba by author, 2 May 2019.

<sup>137</sup> Ibid.

<sup>138</sup> Digital interview with Ghassan Andoni from Beit Sahour by author, 23 December 2022.

<sup>139</sup> E.g., *Arab Center Washington D.C.*, “Israel’s Governance of the Bedouin in the Naqab,” 12 January 2023, <https://arabcenterdc.org/resource/israels-governance-of-the-bedouin-in-the-naqab/>.

<sup>140</sup> Digital interview with Mahmoud Nawajaa from Ramallah by author, 16 November 2022.

<sup>141</sup> Peteet, “Language matters” 35.

<sup>142</sup> Oren Yiftachel, “Epilogue: Studying Naqab/Negev Bedouins—toward a colonial paradigm,” *HAGAR Studies in Culture, Polity and Identities* 8, no. 2 (2008): 83-108.

<sup>143</sup> This argument is further developed by Tatour, “The culturalisation of indigeneity,” 1579.

comparative fold, Ireland has so far been missing. When I probed the use of comparisons to Ireland, the responses among Palestinian organizers were limited. In this section, I discuss why Ireland is not currently on the Palestinian comparative horizon, and I explore what this tells us about how the limits of international comparison.

On 27 May 2021, the Irish flag was raised above Ramallah City Hall in the West Bank whilst the Irish national anthem was played.<sup>144</sup> This marked a special occasion: Ireland had just become the first EU member state to condemn Israeli action in the Palestinian Territories as “de facto annexation.”<sup>145</sup> The action at Ramallah City Hall also symbolized the deepfelt connection many Palestinians have with the Irish, who have suffered under the yoke of British imperialism and its aftermaths just like them. The action mirrored the incorporation of the symbolism of the Palestinian struggle into the Irish political landscape, as we saw in Chapter 4. Yet, whereas the Irish are engaged in the ongoing comparative positioning of both contexts, in Palestine, these modes of comparativism are not only rare, but in many contexts non-existent.

For most Palestinians I spoke to, comparisons with Ireland were a thing of the past. While the felt connection is still strong, the Irish struggle no longer constitutes a model of change for Palestinians in the present. When Ireland comes up, it is considered to be a historical source of inspiration, predominantly for resistance tactics such as boycotts and hunger strikes. BDS coordinator Mahmoud was aware that “the boycott even started in Ireland!”<sup>146</sup> “It was started by someone named ‘Boycott,’” he recalled.<sup>147</sup> Yet beyond this historical connection, the comparison has faded to the background. Similarly so in the case of hunger strikes. Sahar, director of Addameer, the NGO that supports Palestinian political prisoners, told me: “I don’t think [comparisons are drawn by Palestinian prisoners] in the current time.”<sup>148</sup> As she explained:

The comparison was correct in the 70s and the 80s when the Irish prisoners were in the hunger strike. It was an inspiration to the Palestinian prisoners to initiate their own collective massive hunger strike. ... But the Palestinian experience is much longer than the Irish one. It's still continuing, and it takes lots of other different variations and models from the individual hunger strike to the collective hunger strike.<sup>149</sup>

While the historical similarities with the Irish struggle are remembered in Palestine, they are perceived to be a relic of the past.

This also means that while favorable sentiments towards Ireland are widely shared, comparisons with Ireland are not part of everyday conversations. This is not to say that Palestinian organizers do not have any interest in political events in Ireland, nor that there is no crafting of comparability with the Palestinian case whatsoever. However, when comparisons are drawn, this tends to be with a specific purpose, rather than through everyday resonance. As Mahmoud told me:

The political leadership is more interested in what's happening in Ireland. It's not on the grassroots level. The people are just looking at the connection and everything, but not at the [current] political situation in Ireland.<sup>150</sup>

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<sup>144</sup> *Al Jazeera*, “What’s behind Ireland’s support for Palestine?”; *Irish Central*, “WATCH: Irish flag raised in Palestine in response to Irish solidarity,” 28 May 2021, <https://www.irishcentral.com/news/irish-flag-palestine-irish-solidarity>.

<sup>145</sup> *Reuters*, “Ireland urges Israel to end ‘de facto annexation’ of Palestinian land.”

<sup>146</sup> Digital interview with Mahmoud Nawajaa from Ramallah by author, 16 November 2022.

<sup>147</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>148</sup> Digital interview with Sahar Francis by author, 4 January 2023.

<sup>149</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>150</sup> Digital interview with Mahmoud Nawajaa from Ramallah by author, 16 November 2022.

Within leadership circles, there is a consideration of the context of Ireland and the Great Friday Agreement because of the implications it may have for Palestine. Mahmoud and other organizers even “met some of the Sinn Fein political leadership to talk about this.”<sup>151</sup> “What we did is that we compared the Irish experiment in negotiation: when and how to negotiate,” Mahmoud said.<sup>152</sup> Through this meeting, they further developed their negotiation strategies.

The limited everyday resonance of comparisons with Ireland could be explained through the relatively nonviolent ways in which present-day Irish political events take place. While the high-profile events of the Troubles became well known among Palestinians, the current political contestations over the North of Ireland are less likely to incite strong emotional responses. Indeed, while most of my interlocutors knew about the peace process in Ireland, they were not always as up to date with current political developments in Ireland. When I spoke to young organizer Sherin, she explained:

[In Palestine], we’re living wars after wars. We don’t even give wars names. It’s just the war of September 2015 and then October. We don’t have the time to name them. People are really kind of – they don’t want to know about other sufferings. It’s just too much.<sup>153</sup>

This indicates something that is often described as “disaster fatigue.”<sup>154</sup> This term is most often used to explain why publics become less affected over time when they are exposed to catastrophes, either through direct experience or through the news. In the former case, it describes a form of emotional exhaustion that is the result of a collective trauma. The overwhelming nature of Palestinian life under occupation can mean that political events in other parts of the world fade to the background.<sup>155</sup>

Yet, there may also be more specific reasons why comparisons with certain political contexts, predominantly South Africa, resonate more strongly than others. Omar, an outspoken young man from Hebron, suggested a very particular interpretation. “They want to compare [Palestine] to the South African example to put it away from Europe,” he said.<sup>156</sup> As Omar continued: “They want us to normalize that there are countries that are pariah [states], that there are countries with atrocities, or countries that are brutal, like South Africa.”<sup>157</sup> Using the South African example in political organizing is the most likely to be successful in swaying audiences in the Global North, Omar suggests, precisely because apartheid can be positioned as a relatively distant problem. Apartheid happened far away from the publics in the Global North, who constitute primary audiences for comparative organizing, as their governments constitute Israel’s most important allies.

While publics in the Global North are positioned as the audiences of the apartheid comparison, in that they hold the agency to boycott, divest, and impose sanctions on the South African and Israeli governments, they are not held directly responsible for these apartheid systems. This is very different from comparisons with Ireland or Turtle Island. In comparing Israel to these settler colonial contexts, the focal points of comparisons are the British, American,

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<sup>151</sup> Ibid.

<sup>152</sup> Ibid.

<sup>153</sup> Digital interview with Sherin Idais from Hebron by author, 14 December 2022.

<sup>154</sup> Valerie Ingham, Mir Rabiul Islam, John Hicks, Anna Lukasiewicz, and Christopher Kim, “Definition and Explanation of Community Disaster Fatigue,” in *Complex Disasters: Compounding, Cascading, and Protracted*, ed. Anna Lukasiewicz and Tayanah O’Donnell (Singapore: Palgrave Macmillan, 2022), 341-361.

<sup>155</sup> The other side of that coin, Sherin clarified, is a common Palestinian frustration with the overrepresentation of particular news events, primarily those happening in Europe, and the silencing of ongoing suffering in places such as Palestine.

<sup>156</sup> Digital interview with Omar Amwas from Hebron by author, 7 December 2022.

<sup>157</sup> Ibid.

and Canadian publics that are also the intended strategic audiences of the comparisons. For targeted publics, this creates a certain tension and discomfort, in that facing settler colonialism in Palestine requires facing settler colonialism at home. While this could further familiarize and de-exceptionalize the Palestinian situation, it might also be *too catastrophic*, as it hits very close to home. It is important to note, of course, that South African apartheid is rooted in the very same history of British [and Dutch] settler colonialism. Yet, it is precisely the construction of apartheid as a phenomenon in its own right, rooted in, but still somewhat separate from, settler colonialism itself, that means that its condemnation rarely if ever targets European publics directly.

Apartheid comparisons thus form a way of arousing anger that can be directed towards the Israeli regime in a way that is relatively safe for European and American audiences, as it can be positioned as further removed from their own histories. As Ghassan agreed:

When we talk about occupation, most Western countries were occupiers, and they don't like to condemn their past by condemning Israel. ... If we talk about settlements and settlers taking our land – everybody was a thief of Indigenous land in the United States ... so it doesn't resonate. The only [comparison] that resonates is apartheid, because even Americans would say: okay we would be guilty of so many sins, but we managed to recognize Black people and give them civil rights. We are not racist, we don't discriminate, we don't run an apartheid system. And that's why the Americans and Europeans had the courage to stand against South Africa when apartheid became so blunt.<sup>158</sup>

As Ghassan conveys, the apartheid comparison can be construed in a way that is nonthreatening, bolstering a sense of moral superiority.

The relatively rare comparison with Ireland is particularly contentious because it brings the discussion right to the heart of colonial Europe. Whereas settler colonial projects in Turtle Island, just like in South Africa, have transformed into independent nation-states, the North of Ireland continued to be formally part of the United Kingdom. This means that in comparisons between Palestine and Ireland, it is particularly difficult to invisibilize the European roots of settler colonialism. "If European people compare Palestinians to other Europeans," Omar underlined, "[they] can understand that it's similar and it's rooted in the British experience of colonialism in both countries."<sup>159</sup> Acts of comparison between Ireland and Palestine could centralize not only the Israeli settler colonial project, but also the longer history of British interference in Palestine that made the establishment of this project a possible and desired outcome. This repositions the dispossession and repression of Palestinians as at its core a familiar, European issue, rather than a distant, Middle Eastern one.

It is well known that the Zionist movement was founded by Ashkenazi Jews in response to rising antisemitism in Europe.<sup>160</sup> Based on millennia of anti-Jewish discrimination, Zionists argued that Christian Europe would always find it impossible to assimilate Jews in society, which made it necessary to "create a mini-Europe [for Jews] elsewhere."<sup>161</sup> While Zionists (and early proto-Zionists) had long argued for a Jewish homeland in the historical Land of Israel, other colonial locations, including British East Africa (present-day Uganda), were also considered.<sup>162</sup> Due to the alliance with Great Britain, which used its acquired mandate territory to leverage

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<sup>158</sup> Digital interview with Ghassan Andoni from Beit Sahour by author, 23 December 2022.

<sup>159</sup> Ibid.

<sup>160</sup> Joseph Massad, "Zionism's internal others: Israel and the Oriental Jews," *Journal of Palestine Studies* 25, no. 4 (1996): 53-68.

<sup>161</sup> Jacques Kornberg, *Theodor Herzl: from assimilation to Zionism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993), 178.

<sup>162</sup> Gur Alroey, "Journey to New Palestine: The Zionist Expedition to East Africa and the Aftermath of the Uganda Debate," *Jewish Culture and History* 10, no. 1 (2008): 23-58.

Jewish support for the British war effort in WWI, the solution to safeguard the Jewish population was found in Palestine.<sup>163</sup> Yet, this solution only makes sense within a colonial mindset that considers the non-European world as a possible realm for the extension of European politics. As John Galtung writes, “to export a European problem, a more or less shared anti-Semitism from East to West with an admitted peak in the Center of Europe and drop it, not at the doorstep, but well inside the house of the Arabs, can only be understood against a background of century-long traditions of Western colonialism.”<sup>164</sup>

The European roots of the Israeli settler project are made invisible in narratives that deem Israeli apartheid a distant issue, which can (at least partly) be separated from the history of settler colonialism itself. Comparisons with Ireland have the potential to illuminate these deeper roots by underlining the Israeli settler project as the inheritor of the same British Empire that continues to occupy Ireland, but their resonance is more limited, perhaps precisely *because* they engender discomfort. As we have seen in Chapter 4, even within the South of Ireland, the Troubles in the North have become construed as an exceptional ethnic or religious conflict, rather than one episode in a longer and familiar Irish anticolonial struggle. While the long history of British settler activity in Ireland is generally acknowledged, a break is created between this colonial history and Irish resistance in the present. Connecting these moments in a continuous narrative, whether in Ireland or in Palestine, demands a more fundamental shift in awareness over time.

This interpretation, as put forward by Omar, remained contentious. While some of my interlocutors agreed that the avoidance of European settler colonial history mattered to Palestine’s comparative positioning, others did not. Stop the Wall and BDS organizer Jamal contested any kind of assertion that the apartheid analogy’s prominence can be explained through its relative distance from and gentleness towards publics in the Global North. As he elaborated:

For me in the end, it’s about the truth and reality. It’s not about what we choose to present ourselves in comparison with. It’s about our truth. We believe strongly that this is an apartheid [situation], so we have to defend this and go with this analysis. ... It’s not a matter of choosing whether to compare with Ireland or [somewhere else], it’s about the truth.<sup>165</sup>

For Jamal, apartheid is not a strategic interpretation, but a truth claim, in that it best captures the reality that Palestinians are facing.

Within the wider frame of this study, this truth claim can be seen as another indication that the apartheid analogy constitutes not only an epistemological but an ontological intervention. For Jamal and other organizers, Palestine is more comparable to South Africa than to Ireland, as it *is* an apartheid situation. While the experiences, vocabularies, and organizing principles of South Africa are composed into the issue of Palestine in a multiplicity of ways, increasingly in connection to wider settler colonial and Indigenous struggles, the specificities of Ireland are incorporated into the Palestinian present and future in a much more limited sense. The lack of comparability translates into a lesser degree of comparative intervention. The next section brings the acts of comparison with Ireland, South Africa, and Turtle Island together and illuminates the aspects of the Palestinian struggle that exceed current comparative positionings.

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<sup>163</sup> James Renton, “The Balfour Declaration: Its Origins and Consequences,” *Jewish Quarterly* 55, no. 1 (2008): 40-41.

<sup>164</sup> Johan Galtung, “The Middle East and the theory of conflict,” *Journal of Peace Research* 8, no. 3-4 (1971): 175.

<sup>165</sup> Digital interview with Jamal Juma’ from Jerusalem by author, 10 January 2023.

## 5. Crafting (In)comparability: Composing Palestine

As we have seen in this chapter, comparisons have an important function in de-exceptionalizing the Palestinian struggle. By locating Palestine within a family of similar cases, most prominently South Africa, to a limited extent Turtle Island, and sometimes Ireland, organizers problematize the positioning of Palestine as an extraordinarily difficult and complex issue in international relations. These comparisons underline the similarities in experiences of settler colonialism, apartheid, and marginalization. Throughout these chapter, the crafting of comparability has also been weighed, judged, negotiated, rejected, and creative reworked through potential differences. This section brings these comparative positionings together and broadens the scope of the analysis by paying attention to what gets lost in comparative translation.

Within a politically salient comparison, as we have seen, there is always a productive, pivotal friction between similarity and difference. Things to be compared need to be crafted as similar enough to conduct the comparison in the first place, but different enough for the comparison to spark new political possibilities. It is precisely the productive interplay between situations that, in Homi Bhabha's words, are construed as "almost the same but not quite," that pushes the boundaries of how the issue of Palestine can be seen and acted upon.<sup>166</sup> Israel is crafted as an apartheid state, but *not quite* like apartheid South Africa, necessitating a revisioning of the definition of apartheid itself. Palestinians are crafted as an Indigenous people, but *not quite* like Native Americans or other Indigenous people of Turtle Island, engendering a discussion about what Indigeneity in the Palestinian context (and elsewhere) could mean. These slight differences hold the comparison together and produces its rhetorical and practical effectiveness.<sup>167</sup>

The crafting of comparability between Palestine and other contexts through the identification of similarities and differences is not even, nor is it symmetrical. Comparisons between Palestine and South Africa tend to manifest differently in both contexts in that people render visible and politicize different aspects of apartheid based on localized priorities, aims, and concerns. But while apartheid analogies are prevalent across both Palestine and South Africa, and are regularly mobilized, even if the priorities, aims, and concerns differ, this is not the case for comparisons between Ireland and Palestine, which are not reciprocal in the same way. Comparisons between Ireland and Palestine fulfil important functions within the Irish political landscape of continued antagonisms in the context of a seeming "peace," but do not resonate in the same way in post-Oslo Palestine, where they are relatively underutilized politically.

Similar to this limited resonance of Irish experiences, there are distinct and localized elements of the Palestinian struggle that are not (yet) translated through the acts of comparison we encountered in this thesis. When I spoke to Maryam and Reem, prominent women's rights organizers and mental health workers based in Gaza City, this became painfully obvious to me. Maryam and Reem shared their knowledge of the extreme levels of trauma in Gaza due to exposure to aerial bombardments and other kinds of violence, and the critical need for mental health care, which is largely inexistent. Additionally, they told me:

We are 2 million people within 30,660 square meters with this high rate of precarity and unemployment, without movement: It's a big prison! [Palestinians elsewhere] are more open to the outside world. They can travel, only internally but in larger spaces. In Gaza, it's 30

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<sup>166</sup> Homi Bhabha, "Of mimicry and man: The ambivalence of colonial discourse," *October* 28 (1984): 125-133.

<sup>167</sup> This point is made by Keith P. Feldman in speaking about analogy in *A Shadow over Palestine: The Imperial Life of Race in America* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2015), 70.

minutes maximum from the South to the North. There is no space. There is no green area in Gaza. Even the sea, we don't own the sea.<sup>168</sup>

The particular trajectory of the Gaza blockade, and these extreme levels of isolation, violence, and entrapment in Gaza are unlike any of the experiences of those I spoke to in Ireland, South Africa, and Turtle Island.

While I was told many stories of catastrophe over the course of this study, it was when Maryam told me that she decided not to take up a rare opportunity to leave, choosing to continue her mental health work in Gaza over the chance to escape the confinement, the bombings, and the poverty, that I broke out in tears. In translating experiences through comparison, as discussed in Chapter 2, “there is always an element of transformation and perhaps betrayal.”<sup>169</sup> For the first time, I felt that my own writing was doing just that. In the acts of comparison I analyzed in this thesis, these specificities of the Gazan context tended to get lost in comparative translation, as they were caught in a more general comparative narrative on Palestine as a whole. While the strength of the apartheid analogy is precisely that it connects the fragmented situations of Palestinians, including Gazans, into a shared reality, this does efface some particularities. The critique is sometimes made that the comparison between the Occupied Palestinian Territories and South African Bantustans is highly “inexact” in relation to Gaza, because “the Gaza Strip is substantially worse than the South African bantustans ever were.”<sup>170</sup>

Despite its relative lack of resonance within acts of comparison, the particular despair of the Gazan situation is a common topic of conversation in Palestine, especially within wider debates on the experiences of different Palestinian communities. As Maryam and Reem shared:

People in Gaza are living in totally different situations than the people living in Jerusalem.

They have different situations, different tools, different suffering (sic). The people in the West Bank have different issues and the people in the 48 lands are totally facing different problems.

People outside Palestine or in the camps, refugee camps outside Palestine have totally different problems with the identity, with the suffering (sic). They just isolate us so that really, we don't know and feel the suffering of other people.<sup>171</sup>

These situations are not only different, but also uneven, most of my interlocutors assented.

“[Gazans] do envy us [in the West Bank], and we envy people in 48 because they can reach the sea and move freely,” young organizer Mühanned admitted.<sup>172</sup> “We have people from Gaza who come to play football here with the national team,” he continued.<sup>173</sup> “I saw it on the faces of these guys when they came to the West Bank. It felt like they travelled to New York.”<sup>174</sup>

In this sense, comparisons could also take place *between* Palestinian communities. Yet, such comparisons, and any conclusions of the Gazan situation as being (perhaps incomparably) worse than other Palestinian enclaves are contested. “I don't really like to have a scale of suffering,” young organizer Sherin told me when I asked her about these differences, “when there is suffering, there is suffering.”<sup>175</sup> In a broader sense, many of my interviewees objected to comparing and thereby reifying Palestinian communities as separate entities. “In spite of all that I

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<sup>168</sup> Digital interview with Reem Frainah and Maryam Abu Al-Ata from Gaza City by author, 13 November 2022.

<sup>169</sup> Best and Walters, ““Actor-Network Theory” and international relationality,” 333.

<sup>170</sup> *El Mezan Center for Human Rights*, “The Gaza Bantustan: Israeli Apartheid in the Gaza Strip,” 2021, <https://mezan.org/en/uploads/files/16381763051929.pdf>.

<sup>171</sup> Digital interview with Reem Frainah and Maryam Abu Al-Ata from Gaza City by author, 13 November 2022.

<sup>172</sup> Digital interview with Mühanned Qafesha from Hebron by author, 25 November 2022.

<sup>173</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>174</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>175</sup> Digital interview with Sherin Idais from Hebron by author, 14 December 2022.

said to you about dividing the Palestinian people, the Palestinian people feel themselves one unit, one people,” organizer Issa emphasized, as many of my interlocutors would.<sup>176</sup> Speaking about the separated lifeworlds of Palestinian communities, Sherin explained that “[Palestinians] consider them temporary states of being.”<sup>177</sup> Even if differences in experiences are evoked, in this view, they should not be used to reify and entrench them as insurmountable separations.

Yet, in de-exceptionalizing Palestine by locating it in a family of colonial histories, the interstices and disconnections that have emerged through the Israeli settler colonial project are also part of the story. Based on the modes of comparative positioning that have emerged in this thesis, we may wonder if any of these distinct and localized elements of the Palestinian struggle, including the situation in Gaza, might be more productively contrasted and politicized precisely through comparison. For example, Gazan experiences might be mobilized to radicalize the notions of Indigenous refusal we considered in Chapter 6. Mahmoud Darwish once wrote that Gaza constitutes an “incomparable moral treasure for Arabs” because of its “[devotion] to rejection.”<sup>178</sup> Despite the extreme precarity, violence, and entrapment that characterize life in Gaza, those living there continue to reject incorporation into the Israeli settler colonial project. Crafting comparability between this ongoing rejection and the ways in which those in Turtle Island attempt to escape the economic, political, and bureaucratic clutches of settler states might be highly productive. This is how Gaza can become positioned as “the world’s largest Indian reservation.”<sup>179</sup> Not in terms of its actual physical size, but in its demonstration of an Indigenous refusal that is almost, as Helga Tawil-Souri calls it, “larger than life.”<sup>180</sup>

At the same time, as I felt in my conversation with Maryam and Reem, there will always be some level of untranslatability in these acts of comparison. For Mühanned, as the opening quote conveys, the issue of Palestine can be compared to the contexts of Ireland, South Africa, and Turtle Island, but “this extra thing is happening in Palestine and it's different,” and in his view, “worse.”<sup>181</sup> “The Gaza situation with the siege is worse than anything on this earth,” he concluded.<sup>182</sup> Of course, the comparative assessment of the gravity of these situations is dependent on contextually dependent scales of differentiation. In previous chapters, the assessment that the situation in Palestine is worse than their own situation was also voiced by my Irish and South African interlocutors. In comparing Palestine to Turtle Island, however, the assessment from people on both sides of the comparison was more varied. Yet, for the analytical purposes at hand, what Mühanned’s view indicates is that there is always a part of Palestine that transcends comparison to elsewhere.

At the core of a comparison is thus not only a productive friction between similarity and difference, but also a friction between translatability and untranslatability. This friction is always present and irresolvable, as not all elements of a context can be translated to elsewhere. This is also what makes comparing Palestine such a dynamic undertaking, as the incomplete translations established through acts of comparison become considered and negotiated. Mahmoud captured the productive nature of this friction of translatability when he conveyed that “because Palestine

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<sup>176</sup> Digital interview with Issa Souf from Hares by author, 18 November 2022.

<sup>177</sup> Digital interview with Sherin Idais from Hebron by author, 14 December 2022.

<sup>178</sup> Ibid.

<sup>179</sup> Quote by Robert Lovelace as in Steven Salaita, “American Indian studies and Palestine solidarity: The importance of impetuous definitions,” *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education & Society* 6, no. 1 (2017): 26.

<sup>180</sup> Helga Tawil-Souri, “Gaza as Larger than Life,” in *Gaza as Metaphor*, ed. Helga Tawil-Souri and Dina Matar (London: Hurst & Company, 2016), 15-27.

<sup>181</sup> Digital interview with Mühanned Qafesha from Hebron by author, 25 November 2022.

<sup>182</sup> Ibid.



is a unique case - it's really different - we have to get many different ideas from many different struggles.”<sup>183</sup> Rather than positing Palestine as a case that is so unique that it is beyond comparison, Mahmoud suggests that the uniqueness of the case demands a variety of ideas, elements, and indeed comparisons. Given that no comparison can be exhaustive or sufficient in its translation, a multiplicity of comparisons is needed.

This mode of thinking also provides a way forward in reconsidering and studying how comparisons intervene into the fabric of international relations. As comparisons with South Africa, to a limited extent Turtle Island, and sometimes Ireland are incorporated into Palestinian political ideas, practices, landscapes, and organizations, these contexts are no longer simply construed as *similar to* Palestine but become a part of it. In this way, Palestine becomes an amalgamation of heterogeneous elements, a product of international multiplicity, composed of local trajectories as well as histories and futures elsewhere. This is possible not despite but *because* of mutual incongruities and contestations, as they open up the space for the creative composition of Palestine as an issue that is distinct but at the same time deeply connected to political structures and possibilities elsewhere.

### Conclusion

As we have seen over the course of this chapter, acts of comparison push the boundaries of how the issue of Palestine is composed and acted upon, by rendering particular elements of the Palestinian situation visible and politicizing them. Comparisons to South Africa intervene in the issue by connecting the fragmented situations of Palestinians into the shared reality of apartheid. Developments in different parts of Palestine become seen as part of the same Israeli system of racial segregation and discrimination, which is upheld by the PA. Comparisons with Turtle Island deepen the focus on settler colonization, positioning ethnic cleansing and genocide as constitutive elements of the issue of Palestine. The recognition of Palestinians as Indigenous people remains contested yet opens up several contradictory paths for political action.

It is important to note that the acts of comparison discussed in this chapter are not inherently emancipatory. Many of the comparative contestations in this chapter centered precisely on whether the crafting of similarities or differences would aid Palestinians in their struggle for liberation, and if so, how. While the definition of apartheid is being modified to respond to Palestinian priorities, aims, and concerns with broad popular support, the jury is still out on the relevance of Indigeneity, and what this might mean in the Palestinian context. This is important given that Palestinian self-determination refers not only to independent political organization, but also to “[the] process by which Palestinians choose their own political metaphors to name their histories, struggles, and aspirations, drawing on whatever (range of) international framings/precedents seem viable for forwarding their specific (and potentially varied and incommensurate) concerns and objectives.”<sup>184</sup>

Throughout this chapter, we have seen that frictions between similarity and difference, and translatability and untranslatability are at the core of comparative composition. Notions of apartheid and Indigeneity become adopted on the basis of perceived similarities with Palestine, but also modified on the grounds of politically salient distinctions and differentiations. As the cases of Ireland and Gaza show, in some cases, comparisons do fail when they are not perceived

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<sup>183</sup> Digital interview with Mahmoud Nawajaa from Ramallah by author, 16 November 2022.

<sup>184</sup> Rifkin, "Indigeneity, apartheid, Palestine," 58.

to translate the elements that matter. Yet, these moments of untranslatability often become catalysts for renewed comparative positionings. After all, what led Palestinians to deepen the apartheid analogy within a broader settler colonial frame of reference is the identification of the ways in which the comparison with South Africa failed. In this same way, the position of the Irish struggle within colonial Europe or the specificities of the Gazan case, to name just two examples, might become grounds upon which to build different comparative connections.

This is especially important to remember as we enter a new era of Israeli government, which sets out on a more radical – and, for Palestinians, threatening – political course.<sup>185</sup> This period may necessitate new catastrophic forms of comparative positioning, which might even widely differ from the histories, experiences, and vocabularies of the contexts discussed in this thesis, and which might also, in turn, be made to travel beyond Palestine. In this sense, as John Collins argues, Palestine “continues to be an often prophetic index of and shaper of [international] processes.”<sup>186</sup> Whether Palestine is composed as an issue of racial discrimination, settler colonial domination, or as a cause for global justice, these are “processes that continue to shape the conditions within which all of us live our lives.”<sup>187</sup> Through these various acts of comparison, the issue of Palestine is not only de-exceptionalized, but extended much further outwards, as an issue that is rooted in, yet much larger than, its particular geographical homeland.

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<sup>185</sup> *Times of Israel*, “Palestinians urge world to ‘reject any dealings’ with new Netanyahu government.”

<sup>186</sup> Collins, *Global Palestine*, 2.

<sup>187</sup> *Ibid.*

# Chapter 8 – Conclusion: International Relations Through Elsewhere

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## Introduction

As a *study of comparisons*, this thesis has imagined and investigated comparisons as concrete, dynamic interventions into international relations. It has followed acts of comparison as they became mobilized across multiple continents, and illuminated how, as modes of differentiation, these acts alter the fabric of international political life. More specifically, this thesis has explored how Palestine becomes compared to other contexts of political struggle, focusing on Ireland, South Africa, and Turtle Island. Through ethnographic research methods, I have excavated why and how activists, policy makers, and scholars draw comparisons between these contexts, and with what particular effects.

I have argued that comparisons should be seen as part of the equipment that actors in international relations draw upon in their worldly engagements in at least three distinctive ways: in translating political experiences, in drawing political relations, and in composing political issues. In this concluding chapter, I circle back to the argumentative threads of the thesis and weave the comparative stories of Ireland, South Africa, Turtle Island, and Palestine together to provide an outline of my findings. In the first section, I summarize the key findings of this study through the prism of the triple meanings of catastrophe. In section two, I outline what I see as the most important theoretical and methodological contributions this study has made.

The expectation is that a conclusion, at least on some level, provides a sense of closure, but whilst I intend on doing so, I also gear this concluding chapter towards creating openings. This means that I pay attention to moments where the argumentative threads do not fit or where they could potentially lead down a different analytical path. Section three reflects on the limitations of this study and gestures at possible future avenues of research. The fourth and final section discusses the wider significance of this study and probes the questions it raises for debates about international solidarity, justice, and pressing political issues today.

## 1. Findings

In this thesis, I have used “catastrophe” as both a sensibility and a heuristic to bring together the different ways in which comparisons intervene in international relations. To hold together the contributions of this thesis, I will discuss them based on my different readings of the term. I start with catastrophic comparisons in their most literal sense, with the meaning of catastrophe as a situation that causes great damage or suffering. In this ethnography of comparisons, I have demonstrated how acts of comparisons can translate experiences of catastrophe. Drawing on the notion of resonance, I focused here on comparison not only as an intentional analytical act made by a subject when they experience catastrophe, but also as something subliminal and visceral that can happen *to* a subject in such circumstances. While all catastrophic comparisons in this study revolved in some way around the Palestinian *Nakba* (catastrophe), my focus here was particularly on understanding the resonance of the Palestinian situation outside of Palestine.

Across Ireland, South Africa, and Turtle Island, my interlocutors saw their own catastrophic experiences or those of their ancestors reflected in the situation in Palestine. What they saw in Palestine differed in critical ways. My Irish interlocutors emphasized the British

checkpoints, watch towers, and police searches during the time of the Troubles, as well as the discrimination, displacement, and military presence in the decades and centuries of British settler colonialism. Those in South Africa paid particular attention to the experiences of apartheid, segregation, and the deep inequalities that have extended into the present. In Turtle Island, the destruction of Indigenous society and the unquestioned dominance of the settler state tended to be evoked.

These catastrophic experiences could be categorized in the same way, that is, as comparable outgrowths of the international history of settler colonialism. For certain purposes, it might suffice to say that the comparability of these “cases” can simply be assumed or established on the basis of their similar structural conditions of settler colonialism. In this thesis, however, my aim has been somewhat different. I have taken any such interpretation as one act of comparison among many possible others. Rather than taking a particular comparative framework as a given, I have shown how the scales and functions of comparison are deeply embedded in lived political experiences and localized aims, priorities, and concerns. Comparison, as the process of establishing equivalence between things, eclipses any particular analytical framework, as it emerges through both intentional and more subliminal moments of translation.

The rootedness of the scales and functions of comparison in localized circumstances was illustrated most aptly within the analysis of Ireland. Comparisons with Palestine were common across Ireland, as they resonated deeply with the emotional afterlives of Irish history under British occupation. Yet, those in the North and the South of Ireland construed the comparison in radically different ways, in line with the political realities in which they have found themselves in the wake of the partition of Ireland. For those in the North, the comparison to Palestine formed a concrete connection between ongoing anti-colonial struggles, whereas for those in the South, it became exemplary of Ireland’s past, and further removed from present-day politics. Those in the North and the South not only had different lived experiences that were mobilized in association with Palestine, but the partition of Ireland was also further reified by how they articulated and emphasized those differences through comparison.

In the case of South Africa, we saw how salient features of comparability transformed over time. In terms of translating political experiences, this study showed how the situation in Palestine resonated viscerally with painful memories of the apartheid era, especially those of Black communities. Yet, the analogy between apartheid Israel and South Africa failed to translate some of the embodied understandings of younger South Africans, especially those born after the end of formal apartheid. In more recent years, the continued inequality, marginalization, and dispossession of the Black poor form new modes of resonance with Palestine. Rather than positing Israeli apartheid as similar to South African apartheid in the past, the present-day experiences in both contexts are crafted as similar. As localized aims, priorities, and concerns transform, so do comparisons lose their initial resonance and find new ones.

In Turtle Island, we saw the particular importance of the subliminal level upon which comparative differentiations take shape. Whereas comparisons to Palestine have been commonly used in Ireland and South Africa, the notion that the situation in Palestine can and should be directly compared to that of the Indigenous peoples of Turtle Island is still emerging. For Indigenous people I spoke to in New Mexico, the similarities between both contexts – the living conditions, the settlements, the surveillance - both looked and *felt* familiar. In this sense, comparisons are part of the wider “ecology of sensibility,” as they also translate experiences that

occur below conscious awareness.<sup>1</sup> For those in Turtle Island, this was especially important because it visibilized the occupation of Indigenous land, which has become normalized and accepted over the course of many centuries.

Taken together, these findings suggest that comparative translation entails finding or creating space for aspects of (political) life that are otherwise less visible. This can be done in an analytical sense by developing a comparative model to study the importance of one factor or another, but in this thesis, it referred to something else. The everyday modes of resonance with Palestine that I have studied were less about providing distanced or completely new way of seeing or analyzing political contexts than about recognizing experiences, thoughts, and feelings that were already implicitly there. This is also why the most salient elements of comparability with Palestine that arose were usually those that were most deeply rooted in localized experiences and concerns. By seeing them in a new comparative light, these localized experiences became more broadly articulable and, in some cases, shared, even in a very dispersed international sense.

This brings us to the second meaning of catastrophe, as something that emerges in and through relations. In this sense, a catastrophe is an encounter with someone or something which confronts our deeply held beliefs about ourselves or the world around us. The catastrophe then lies within the collision of different lifeworlds and viewpoints. In this study, I analyzed comparisons that were catastrophic in that they allowed subjects to view ostensibly disparate situations in a different light or reveal the wider dynamics out of which these situations emerge. Comparisons functioned as ways to reveal the deeper relations between situations, or to (re)draw these relations in a more active sense. I focused especially on the function of comparative acts in shaping relations of similarity and closeness, especially across international borders.

In some cases, as we saw in Ireland, comparisons to Palestine primarily recast political relations locally. For Southerners, the comparison to Palestine served as a “jolt to consciousness,” in that it illuminated their lost connections to the historical anti-colonial struggle that continued in the North. Beyond reuniting (some) Southerners and Northerners, comparisons to Palestine also fulfilled an important function within the North itself, in terms of reestablishing republican connections in the wake of the peace process. Movements for Palestine, built upon the resonance with the occupation of Ireland, have become an avenue of radical consciousness since the Good Friday agreement. As Northern loyalists have come to draw linkages to Israel, we may say that internal political tensions are displaced onto elsewhere.

In South Africa, I witnessed a split in how comparisons were mobilized in drawing political relations. In the past few decades, close relations have been maintained between the ANC, Palestine solidarity movements, and sometimes even the Palestinian leadership, who have coalesced around apartheid comparisons. These connections remain strong today but have become challenged through a new generation of grassroots organizers who have started connecting the dispossession and marginalization of Palestinians to the realities of the Black poor in post-apartheid South Africa. These movements challenge the identification of the apartheid system as the root issue and reveal apartheid to be only one manifestation of the wider oppressive and exploitative relations between race and capital spanning across these contexts. For many South Africans, this comparative mode of relation-drawing provides a catastrophic rethinking of the present political era, and demands a withdrawal from the political networks of the ANC.

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<sup>1</sup> Austin, "Security compositions," 260.

That acts of comparison do not only hold things together but also transform or erode existing relations became even clearer in the analysis of Turtle Island. Here the comparison with Palestine as an active context of settler colonial dispossession provides a form of connection with similar situations elsewhere, which bolsters the resurgence of Indigenous resistance based around the more political meaning of Indigeneity. At the same time, these emergent relations strengthen attempts to refuse the dominance of the settler states, most powerfully by rejecting the ideas and institutions that make up settler projects, as well as the broader international relations that grant these projects legitimacy. In this sense, the catastrophic potential of comparisons between Palestine and Turtle Island is as much about drawing relations, as about *withdrawing from* relations.

While these modes of relation-drawing all took Palestine as their primary target of comparison, there was no uniformity in how relations between self and others were shaped or how perceived similarities led to closeness or group-formation. Instead, the comparative acts examined in this study fulfilled widely different functions, spanning local and international levels, as they both create and erode political collectivities. Taken together, these findings also show how modes of political connectivity in the wake of revolutionary movements become questioned. Across these four contexts, we have seen how the embeddedness of revolutionary leaders within political systems has become a cause for concern, and how people deliberately try to withdraw from these particular relations. These findings underline the need to examine the stakes and politics that attend comparative acts, even, or perhaps especially, if they are mobilized by revolutionary movements and leaders within the context of international solidarity.

Considering the third meaning of catastrophe, as something creative and transformative, this study questioned how comparisons create political possibilities. I focused here specifically on how comparative acts can be mobilized in composing political issues in international relations. As we have seen, the scales and functions of the comparisons considered in this study were deeply embedded in distinct and localized political contestations in Ireland, South Africa, and Turtle Island. In focusing on the creative and compositional aspect of comparison, I explored how these contexts are composed into Palestine as a political issue, as they are incorporated into Palestinian political ideas, practices, landscapes, and organizations. I shifted focus to acts of comparison among Palestinians and investigated if and how the localized political trajectories of Ireland, South Africa, and Turtle Island provided visions and political possibilities for the Palestinian struggle for liberation.

In some cases, they simply did not. While comparisons to Palestine reconstituted the Irish political landscape in a multiplicity of ways, comparisons to Ireland had a minimal resonance within present-day Palestine. When comparisons were mobilized, for example between boycott tactics, hunger strikers, or negotiation strategies, they only had a limited temporal and spatial reach. The analysis identified possible reasons for this lack of resonance. For some interlocutors, the situations were simply too different in the present moment to conduct the comparison, whereas for others, the settler colonial similarities that could be identified would engender discomfort with the intended audiences of the comparison, that is, those in the Global North. Without concrete comparative connections to Ireland, its political trajectory largely disappears from the Palestinian comparative stage.

By contrast, apartheid analogies to South Africa currently provide the most prominent model of change for Palestinians. Comparisons to South Africa are mobilized to intervene in the issue of Palestine by connecting the fragmented situations of different communities of Palestinians into the shared reality of apartheid. Through apartheid analogies, developments in

different parts of Palestine become seen as part of the same Israeli system of racial segregation, discrimination, and Bantustanization, which is upheld through the architecture of the post-Oslo political order, including the PA. We have also seen how apartheid analogies have become weighed, judged, negotiated, and creatively reworked within Palestine, by illuminating additional aspects of apartheid that more strongly configure in the Palestinian case. In this sense, the symbolic reservoir of South Africa continues to be mobilized, but the grounds of comparison are transformed through the particularities of the Palestinian context.

Comparisons to Turtle Island are mobilized to deepen apartheid analogies and provide renewed political visions and possibilities. While the apartheid analogy de-exceptionalizes the issue of Palestine, the Turtle Island comparison contributes to this endeavor by locating all these contexts within family of colonial histories. The potential recognition of Palestinians *as* an Indigenous people, similar to the people of Turtle Island, is an emergent topic of debate, as the experiences of Palestinians cannot be mapped easily onto the history of Indigenous people elsewhere. At the same time, by positioning ethnic cleansing and genocide as constitutive elements of the Indigenous experience, comparisons to Turtle Island push the boundaries of how the issue of Palestine can be seen and acted upon. Through ongoing debates and contestations, claims to Indigeneity open up several contradictory and indeed contested paths for political action, from the fight for Indigenous rights within the state to the more radical challenge of the contours of the Israeli settler colonial project.

Just as the scales and functions of comparisons to Palestine proved to be deeply embedded in the localized experiences of those in Ireland, South Africa, and Turtle Island, so were these acts of comparison transformed locally in accordance with Palestinian aims, priorities, and concerns. In this sense, comparability across international contexts truly becomes an “achievement,” an outcome of relational and dynamic repositioning.<sup>2</sup> My analysis of the creative dimensions of comparison also underlined elements that got lost in comparative translation, including, most importantly, the specificities of the Gazan context. The blockade of Gaza tends to be positioned as different or perhaps incomparably *worse* than the other contexts discussed in this thesis. I argued that it is precisely these moments of untranslatability that can become catalysts for renewed comparative positionings, engendering political visions and vocabularies that can in turn transit beyond Palestine.

## 2. Contributions

Through these findings, this thesis offers multiple contributions. The first overarching contribution was to theorize and analyze how comparisons intervene in international relations. Through fine-grained analysis of four empirical contexts, I have traced the role of comparative acts within the concrete and practical work of world-making. I built up this argument from the resonance of experiences to the making of collectivities to the composition of political issues. In moving in-between individual and collective acts of comparison and their composition into political issues, I have started connecting situated knowledge acts to the grander workings of international relations.

Starting from the individual level, I have argued for the subliminal role of comparisons in translating political experiences. Whereas we have often been presented with reasoned assessments of comparability between Palestine and another context, interlocutors often

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<sup>2</sup> Stengers, "Comparison as a matter of concern," 48-63.

emphasized that beyond these factors of comparability, it was mostly something that they *felt*. In some cases, interlocutors would only become aware of their own comparisons through the research encounter itself. In allowing for these multiple manifestations, I have tried to make sense of comparison as more than an intentional cognitive operation; as something that is emotional, visceral, and often involuntary – though shapes how we relate to others; how we resonate with them through our own experiences (of pain, joy, and otherwise). In a world that expects us to be conscious, reflexive, and in control (of our lives and our politics), I have tried to shift focus to what escapes our control and yet animates our actions.

In contrast to studies of comparison in International Relations which have tended to remain focused on elite-level actors and the use of comparison as a form of deliberate analogical reasoning, my analysis has thus shown that comparisons between contexts of political contestation are often called into being through nonintentional resonance. As we have seen, the way in which people in Ireland, South Africa, and Turtle Island compared themselves to Palestine was deeply rooted in their own political circumstances and (traumatic) experiences. This dovetails with psychological studies of comparison elementary mechanism for perceiving distinctions which can be automatic, implicit, and subliminal yet adds additional layers to it, namely the political and international dimensions of comparisons.<sup>3</sup>

While there is a rich body of literature in psychology on comparisons as modes of social differentiation, studying how people compare their own attitudes, abilities, or possessions to those of others within society, my study suggests the importance of comparisons people draw to other societies across the realm we call the international. In the contexts studied in this thesis, people compared their political experiences to those elsewhere. This sometimes involved quite literally projecting one's experience onto another situation, e.g., an Irishman who *sees* Israeli soldiers *as* British soldiers. While these acts of comparison emerged on what psychologists call the "horizontal" dimension of solidarity and communion, these acts were also used to reveal the asymmetrical circumstances in which people find themselves, and the wider international relations out of which these circumstances emerge. Through comparison, people were often able to identify similar political conditions and/or structures of power. These findings suggest the need to broaden the focus from the *social* role of comparisons, to the (*international*) *political* role.

Moving on to the more explicitly collective level, I have argued for the multifaceted role of comparison as a mode of relation-drawing. Through the comparison between Palestine and South Africa, strong political connections have formed between leading elites, religious groups, and political movements, and these are continually changing and evolving based on pressing political concerns. In this sense, comparisons form an important way not only to draw political relations but also to negotiate the terms of a relationship. This became especially clear in comparisons between Palestine and Turtle Island, where comparative positioning remains a contested process, especially as it is used to contest the dominant mode of political organization (the settler state), and as frictions arise around the vocabulary used to do so (Indigeneity). In the Irish case, we similarly witnessed how comparisons to Palestine redrew political configurations locally. This shows that the importance of any comparison to elsewhere is not always primarily located in the connection to that other place.

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<sup>3</sup> E.g., Chatard, Bocage-Barthélémy, Selimbegović, and Guimond, "The woman who wasn't there"; Mussweiler, Rüter, and Epstude, "The man who wasn't there."



While Shilliam positioned comparison as a relatively shallow mode of relationality, with identification, inhabitation, and enfolding constituting possible “deeper” modes, my analysis has thus found the emergence of different degrees and forms of relationality through comparison.<sup>4</sup> Taking seriously Canda’s argument to “make some space within the concept of ‘relationship,’ to acknowledge the broad spectrum” of relationality, I have also included tenuous, fraught, and failed connections by looking at moments in which the comparative translation between contexts was impossible, undesirable, or incomplete.<sup>5</sup> The variability of these insights underlines the need to examine how these relations endure and how they fail, which is closely connected to the stakes and politics that attend these comparative acts, as I argued in the previous section. Yet, in a more theoretical sense, this positions the issue of comparison firmly within the bounds of relational IR, confirming once again that “any approach foregrounding relations or the relational is aided by the recognition of the ways in which relations are spun out across comparative practices.”<sup>6</sup>

Finally, in connecting these situated knowledge acts to the grander workings of international relations, I have studied the composition of political issues in and through comparisons. Through this analysis, I have sought to contribute to the emergent “research agenda on the variety and effects of practices of comparison in world politics.”<sup>7</sup> I add to this literature by showing that comparisons are not only important in ordering pre-existing entities such as states, but in the fundamental composition of what an entity or issues is in the first place. As we have seen, comparisons to South Africa, to a limited extent Turtle Island, and in rare cases Ireland intervened into the ontology of the issue of Palestine, as it became crafted *as* an apartheid issue or *as* an Indigenous issue. In this sense, comparison becomes constitutive to the making of the very stuff of international relations.

In formulating this compositionist account of comparison, I have built upon and strengthened literature that seeks to erode any clear-cut methodological distinction between “micro” and “macro” politics.<sup>8</sup> I have valued situated events or experiences whilst exploring their significance within the larger heterogeneous political structures of which they are a part.<sup>9</sup> Rather than providing a bird’s eye perspective, and writing up a round and coherent story, I have provided fragments, which contribute to, but in no way exhaust, the making of Palestine as a political issue. In so doing, I also speak back to the literature on governance objects. I have identified comparison as a key way in which issues or other objects are crafted as “distinct, malleable and politically salient.”<sup>10</sup> Indeed, as we have seen throughout this thesis, it is through comparison that the distinctiveness of the issue of Palestine was interrogated and established, and that particular elements of the issue were highlighted and politicized.

My second overarching contribution was to propose a methodological foundation for engaging with others as active makers of comparison. Through this ethnography of comparisons, I aim to contribute to the literature on the politics of knowledge cultivation in and beyond academia. This project especially speaks to methodological debates that focus on how knowledge acts intervene in the political world. As a particular branch of research methods, comparative methods can be said to intervene in the world by creating patterns of scientifically salient

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<sup>4</sup> Shilliam, *The Black Pacific*.

<sup>5</sup> Canda, “‘I Fell in Love with Carlos the Meerkat,’” 244.

<sup>6</sup> Schinkel, “Making climates comparable,” 391.

<sup>7</sup> Müller, Albert, and Langer, “Practices of comparison and the making of international orders,” 5.

<sup>8</sup> Åhäll, “Feeling everyday IR,” 150; Solomon and Steele, “Micro-moves in international relations theory.”

<sup>9</sup> Huysmans and Nogueira, “International Political Sociology as a Mode of Critique.”

<sup>10</sup> Corry, *Constructing a Global Polity*, 87.

similarities and differences, for example between varieties of capitalism, degrees of democracy, or different types of society. Yet, as John Law has remarked, “detecting ‘the right’ similarities and differences is difficult, complex, and involves going to extraordinary lengths to delete ‘the wrong’ similarities and differences,” to remove the noise in observed data.<sup>11</sup> This is because “there are just too many possible similarities and differences out there,” so the researcher needs to decide which ones matter and which ones do not, and isolate them to gauge any possible effects.<sup>12</sup> In so doing, as Law concludes: “Realities grow out of distinctions between ‘right’ and ‘wrong’ patterns of similarity and difference.”<sup>13</sup>

Throughout this thesis, we have seen that processes of selecting and negotiating the “right” and the “wrong” kind of similarities and differences also play out in the everyday arenas of political life. In the contexts I investigated, these decisions were usually made on explicitly political grounds, as they were based on considerations of which political experiences (apartheid, Indigeneity) were made visible and which political futures (civil rights, decolonization) were made possible. If we position these findings within the existing literature on the politics of knowledge cultivation, it becomes clear that this way of comparative decision-making is not so different from academic comparativism after all. This scholarly work has underlined time and time again that selecting categories of comparison for academic research practices is always grounded in normative considerations of some kind.<sup>14</sup> What makes academic comparativism distinctive is not the particular practice of comparison per se, but the authoritative research networks and communities in which comparative methods are developed and which give these methods credence.<sup>15</sup> It is through these structures of authority that certain comparisons become connected to standards of academic knowledge and scientific practice.

In this thesis, I have not explicitly questioned the meaning and boundaries of science as an authoritative practice, nor have I been very concerned with academic comparativism at all, but what I have done is placing comparative acts by scholars (including myself) and others on a similar footing and studying them side by side. My ambition in this more horizontal way of approaching comparison is to start a conversation about the function and meaning of acts of comparison as they span across academic and non-academic environments. By drawing attention to everyday, vernacular, and informal (or simply “non-academic”) acts of comparison, I propose focusing on the comparative dimension of life in a much wider sense, and excavating how this dimension intersects with what we call “politics” or “science” in all kinds of generative, provocative, or even destructive ways. In this sense, academic comparisons can be placed within the wider realm of comparative positionings, and the stakes and politics that attend such comparative acts can be similarly interrogated.

The third and final overarching contribution of this thesis was to present an empirical analysis of the existence of Palestine in and through international comparisons. Through the empirical insights emerging from this study, I contribute to the literature on the Palestinian resistance movement and international solidarity, which had already been concerned with comparisons between Palestine and the contexts discussed in this thesis. My contribution is slightly different from most studies within in this literature in that my primary focus was not on

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<sup>11</sup> Law, *After method: Mess in social science research*, 110.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> E.g., Deville, Guggenheim, and Hrdličková, *Practising Comparison*, Pollock, “Conundrums of Comparison,” Spivak, “Rethinking comparativism,” Sobe, “Problematizing comparison in a post-exploration age.”

<sup>15</sup> Bruno Latour and Steve Woolgar, *Laboratory life: The construction of scientific facts* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1986).

assessing how well any of these comparisons fits the Palestinian case, but on showing the workings and politics of these particular comparisons. In this sense, I offer no particular conclusions as to which comparison fits best, but I do present a dynamic analysis of how various comparisons are weighed, judged, negotiated, rejected, and creatively reworked in practice.

In contributing to the aims of the Palestinian resistance movement, I have attempted to show how these various comparisons can be folded together to create pathways for possible political futures. Moreover, I have attempted to show which questions and concerns might guide any future comparative positionings. In the most practical sense, I hope this helps scholars, activists, and policymakers, especially those within the movement for Palestine, in their creative comparative work. In writing this, I'm reminded of the hope of one of my Palestinian interlocutors, who expressed the belief that comparison "helps us to look at different situations and to solve it even better than these situations. Better than the Irish, better than the current South African, better than the current Americans with [the] Natives or the Canadian with [the] Natives."<sup>16</sup>

### 3. Limitations and Future Research

In this study I have taken Palestine as the central node of a wider web of comparative relations. This meant that all acts of comparison analyzed in this study were connected to Palestine. As a result of this analytical decision, this study was in some ways asymmetrical. In practice, I have devoted more attention to how those in Ireland, South Africa, and Turtle Island compared themselves *to* Palestine, than vice versa. Chapters 4-6 focused exclusively on comparisons to Palestine, whereas Chapter 7 encompassed acts of comparison from Palestine to those multiple contexts. In some ways, this was unavoidable, as this analytical asymmetry reflected the asymmetrical empirical reality that there is more sustained attention for the situation in Palestine from these different contexts than the other way around.

As I selected the contexts of Ireland, South Africa, and Turtle Island based on the existence of comparisons *to* Palestine, this meant that these contexts were also my focal points in analyzing comparisons *from* Palestine. This has an important limitation. Of course, some of my Palestinian interlocutors thought that there were other contexts that ought to be drawn into comparative relation to Palestine. For example, over the course of this study, comparisons to the Russian invasion of Ukraine started emerging, and these comparisons became invoked most prominently to visibilize the different international responses to the Russian versus the Israeli occupation. While this mode of comparativism was very new, comparisons were also drawn with much older experiences of empire, such as the Roman and the Ottoman occupations of Palestine. Since all of these contexts fell out of the geographical and temporal scope of this study, I decided to disregard these acts of comparison. We may wonder how the findings of this study would differ if the comparative contexts chosen had been different, or if I had centered the analysis on those acts of comparison that emerged *from* Palestine only.

While I selected the contexts of Ireland, South Africa, and Turtle Island based on the prevalence of comparisons with Palestine, another potential limitation is that they all fall within the bounds of a particular kind of progressive politics. Consequently, this also raises the question of how the outcome of the study was shaped by this mode of political organizing. Further study could be done into comparisons with contexts that are not usually considered progressive in that

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<sup>16</sup> Digital interview with Omar Amwas from Hebron by author, 7 December 2022.

same way, or that could be described as more conservative, in the sense that they might rather be focused on protecting a particular way of life, and/or that are more explicitly religiously-oriented.<sup>17</sup> This is especially important given how Palestine figures as ‘The Holy Land(s)’ in a more general sense for diverse groups of believers, including the South African Christians we met in Chapter 5, and provided its more specific significance for Islamic and Islamist movements and parties in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. An example of a comparison in this vein is with Algeria, a case of an anticolonial struggle that was inspired by Islamist ideals drawing on the Palestinian struggle. A study of comparisons between Palestine and such a case from within the Muslim world would illuminate the political salience of different elements of the Palestinian struggle for liberation, such as its Islamic or Islamist underpinnings.

For the sake of consistency, I also disregarded any comparisons *between* Ireland, South Africa, and Turtle Island, independent from the connection to Palestine. For example, historical linkages and comparative connections between South African Bantustans and Native American reservations were not included. Another possible avenue of further study is to trace comparative connections through both time and space, as the experiences, vocabularies and organizing principles from one context transit elsewhere.<sup>18</sup> Tracing the transit of ideas and practices through comparison is also fruitful in the context of settler colonial or other political regimes, which have often learned from each other through comparative positionings.<sup>19</sup> As discussed in Chapter 3, Israeli comparisons to other settler colonial contexts formed a constitutive part of the Zionist project.

Relatedly, a potential avenue for future research in this vein is to illuminate Israeli comparative practices and their ideational and material effects. While Israeli acts of comparison were beyond the scope of this study, future work could trace how comparisons have become embedded in Israeli strategies of rule.<sup>20</sup> In my view, an especially fruitful line of research would be to interrogate the comparative evocations of Israeli visions of “making the desert bloom.”<sup>21</sup> As the Zionist movement sought to “create a mini-Europe [for Jews] elsewhere,” to what extent and how did comparisons to European contexts inform how the land was remade, and with what environmental effects?<sup>22</sup> In line with Heather Anne Swanson’s study of the physical transformation of Hokkaido through comparisons to the American West and Southern Chile, such research could centralize how comparisons are “always inside the material stuff of the world.”<sup>23</sup>

Looking back, I would like to have provided a more sustained analysis of the materiality of comparisons to Palestine. The shortening of my fieldwork periods due to the Covid-19 pandemic meant that I was more reliant on narrative accounts than initially intended, and that I was not able to return to Palestine after the first exploratory trip, as I had planned. As a result, I was less able to trace in a more materially oriented way how comparisons became embedded into institutions, metrics, and landscapes. While I was still able to analyze how the concrete, material reality of Palestine was connected to the more abstract, ideational meanings

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<sup>17</sup> This point on conservatism as another form of contentious politics is inspired by George Lawson, *Anatomies of Revolution* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019).

<sup>18</sup> For example, see Rifkin, “Indigeneity, apartheid, Palestine.”

<sup>19</sup> Stoler, *Carnal knowledge and imperial power*.

<sup>20</sup> Stoler, “Tense and tender ties.”

<sup>21</sup> Alan George, ““Making the desert bloom” A myth examined,” *Journal of Palestine Studies* 8, no. 2 (1979): 88-100.

<sup>22</sup> Kornberg, *Theodor Herzl*, 178.

<sup>23</sup> Swanson, “Landscapes, by comparison,” 120.

attached to it in various, complex, and indeed comparative ways, there is much scope for a more sustained materialist analysis of the significance of international comparisons, whether in the context of Palestine or elsewhere.

In reflecting on this study, I also realized that I had expected the analysis to center, at least in some part, on the notion of nationalism. After all, the Palestinian movement is at its core a national movement of liberation and self-determination, albeit within a wider quest for decolonization.<sup>24</sup> While interlocutors did emphasize that Palestinians are one people, despite the many fractures and separations, the language of nationalism itself was not often mobilized. Additionally, most of my Palestinian interlocutors remarked that their target was the Zionist project, and that they strongly believed in the future of Palestine as a home for a multiplicity of peoples, cultures, and religious groups, as it had been prior to the Nakba. While further research could investigate the contemporary meaning and trajectory of Palestinian nationalism, for me, this served as a reminder that this study could only be conducted through careful listening, and by challenging my own preconceptions in the process.

As I have mentioned before, I consider it highly fruitful to study academic comparisons alongside other modes of comparative positioning, and to examine their stakes and politics. In the case of Palestine, this is especially relevant. As Palestine is often seen as a difficult or contested issue within academic communities, there is a scholarly politics of whether to evoke Palestine, and in what sense. In some settings, people remarked that I was “brave” to even study comparisons to Palestine in the first place, considering what it might mean for my career. As Steve Salaita said: “I’ve been tracking Anglophone academic job listings for five years, monitoring them for twenty, and have yet to see the word ‘Palestine’ in a single advertisement.”<sup>25</sup> Salaita himself was notoriously un-hired at his professorial job after his tweets protesting the Israeli bombardments of Gaza were deemed antisemitic.<sup>26</sup> Aside from the structural possibilities and constraints to comparative positionings in the wider realms of international political life, this suggests the importance of questioning the academic limits to and politics of comparativism.

Finally, investigating the resistance to comparison can also be fruitful in a different way. Just as the political situation in Palestine is sometimes construed as so complex that is “beyond comparison,” so do other contexts become crafted as too specific to compare.<sup>27</sup> The most obvious example, as discussed in Chapter 2, is the Holocaust, the gravity of which is often positioned as inherently incomparable.<sup>28</sup> Another example of an untranslatable injustice is the Transatlantic slave trade. While there are many valid reasons why we may not want to compare these situations, for example because we do not want to do violence to their severity and particularity, this thesis has demonstrated that there is not only a politics to comparability, but to incomparability too. In future studies, there is much potential to further deepen our understanding of these red lines, and how they determine possible comparative horizons, both within and beyond academia.

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<sup>24</sup> For more on the relationship between nation-building and decolonization, see Adom Getachew, *Worldmaking after Empire: The Rise and Fall of Self-Determination* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2019).

<sup>25</sup> Steven Salaita, “The Inhumanity of Academic Freedom,” a transcript of the 2019 TB Davie Memorial Lecture at the University of Cape Town, delivered 7 August 2019, <https://stevesalaita.com/the-inhumanity-of-academic-freedom/>.

<sup>26</sup> The *New York Times*, “Professor’s Angry Tweets on Gaza Cost Him a Job,” 12 September 2014, <https://www.nytimes.com/2014/09/13/world/middleeast/professors-angry-tweets-on-gaza-cost-him-a-job.html>.

<sup>27</sup> Peteet, “Language matters,” 32.

<sup>28</sup> Shaw, “From comparative to international genocide studies,” 648.

#### 4. Wider Significance

The findings of this thesis have implications beyond the bounds of academic debates, as they could simultaneously be read as a sympathetic critique of the politics of international solidarity. With this thesis, I challenge the idea that international solidarity can be used as a general notion, or as a blanket statement. Based upon the emancipatory idea that “justice is indivisible,” the aim of many solidarity activists today is to locate the struggle for justice at the intersection of race, class, gender, sexism, homophobia, colonialism, and imperialism.<sup>29</sup> While this thesis underwrites the importance of establishing one’s position in relation to similar and/or related struggles in the quest for justice as a broad and encompassing aim, and within these pivotal intersections, it also compels us to think about the nature of justice or solidarity statements. In more specific terms, it questions the belief that someone with a certain background, identity, or political proclivity would automatically be inclined (or need) to practice solidarity in a particular way.

As we have seen in this thesis, relating to struggles elsewhere takes place precisely through very localized aims, priorities, and concerns. These aims, priorities, and concerns are not static or reducible to a particular discourse but are a fragile, dynamic outcome of one’s circumstances, views, and bodily experiences. Therefore, establishing solidarity cannot happen simply on the basis of a particular identity (for instance national, racial, or Indigenous) that is assumed to be inherently in sympathetic identification with another identity. While we may say that the Irish as a whole tend to be sympathetic towards the Palestinian struggle for liberation, the mode of relating to Palestine, as we have seen, is fractured between the North and the South. While we may speak about Black-Palestinian solidarity in the case of South Africa (or many other places), whether there is solidarity and how it is practiced proved to be highly dependent upon religiosity, for one thing, and countless other aspects of people’s life trajectories and the wider ecologies of sensibility in which they found themselves.

This thesis thus compels us zoom in on the cracks and fractures that are hidden behind general statements of solidarity or justice. Even if the comparative statements we encountered in this thesis did evoke some kind of unequivocal or unconditional alliance (such as Irish – Palestinian, Black – Palestinian, or Indigenous – Palestinian solidarity) based on shared histories, experiences or identities, these statements were necessarily situated, contingent, and contested from multiple directions. This underlines the important point that political alliances can never be natural, essential, or transhistorical, as they are outcomes of particular moments of political positioning. As this study has argued, one primary way of establishing such political positionings is precisely through situated acts of comparison. After all, the story of international solidarity is not in any way scripted, and, as this thesis has tried to show, it is precisely this catastrophic or creative nature that spurs its historical development on and determines its particular beauty.

For other kinds of purposes, and in the widest possible sense, this thesis compels a reconsideration of comparisons as they become built into international political life. What are the stakes and politics that attend acts of comparison across realms other than those we got to know in this thesis? The most urgent political issues we are faced with today are fundamentally stooled on comparisons. As I have suggested in the opening sections of this thesis, international issues such as climate change or inequality cannot be made knowable and actionable without acts of comparison. Whereas climate change is composed through comparative assessments of things

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<sup>29</sup> See, for example, Nada Elia, "Justice is indivisible: Palestine as a feminist issue," *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education & Society* 6, no. 1 (2017): 45-63.

like temperature, permafrost, and carbon dioxide emissions, inequality emerges out of comparative levels of income, wealth, or living standards. This thesis has underlined the need to think carefully about which roads any particular comparative positioning leads us onto. These roads are always winding, and our comparisons partially shape what turns we ultimately take.

Finally, I want to end this thesis by urging the reader to interrogate how comparisons reverberate in and through the things that they care most about. With this thesis, I hope to have planted a seed for us to start thinking through all kinds of taken for granted comparisons. Over time, this seed may sprout into a greater collective awareness of how we conduct international relations through elsewhere, including why we compare, how we compare, and what it is that we would most like to compare for.

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# Appendix

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List of interviewees:

## Ireland

	<b>Name</b>	<b>Location</b>	<b>Date</b>
1	Raymond Deane	Dublin/Bavaria	11 February 2021
2	Ryan Moore	Belfast/Derry	17 February 2021
3	Peter Kelly	Belfast	17 February 2021
4	Fra Hughes	Belfast	18 February 2021
5	Ciara Ni Heachain	Belfast	18 February 2021
6	Máire [pseudonym]	Galway	23 February 2021
7	Robert Boyd	Dublin	25 February 2021
8	James Bowen	Cork	9 March 2021
9	Catherine Hutton	Derry	17 March 2021
10	Cully Rads	Cork	9 April 2021
11	Brendan Barry	Cork	14 April 2021
12	Amir Abualrob	Dublin	12 June 2021
13	Mick Nugent	Cork	14 June 2021
14	Conor [pseudonym]	Cork	14 June 2021
15	Marty Rafferty	Belfast	23 June 2021
16	Thomas Gould	Cork	1 July 2021

## South Africa

	<b>Name</b>	<b>Location</b>	<b>Date</b>
1	Ntuthuko Nkosi	Newcastle	17 November 2021
2	Ziyaad Patel	Johannesburg	18 November 2021
3	Martin Jansen	Cape Town	30 November 2021
4	Edwin Arrison	Cape Town	1 December 2021
5	Yusuf [pseudonym]	Johannesburg	7 December 2021
6	Moss Ntlha	Johannesburg	14 December 2021
7	Suraya Dadoo	Johannesburg	15 December 2021
8	Naazim Adam	Johannesburg	23 December 2021
9	Salim Vally	Johannesburg	18 January 2022
10	Parvin [pseudonym]	Johannesburg	20 January 2022
11	Sarah [pseudonym]	Johannesburg	20 January 2022
12	Marthie Momberg	Stellenbosch	26 January 2022
13	Sheila Barsel	Cape Town	17 February 2022
14	Humairaa Mayet	Johannesburg	25 February 2022
16	William Shoki	Johannesburg	28 February 2022

## Turtle Island

	<b>Name</b>	<b>Location</b>	<b>Date</b>
1	Ibrahim [pseudonym]	Toronto	8 March 2020
2	Hammam Farrah	Toronto	13 April 2020
3	Anna Badillo	Toronto	19 March 2021
4	Elena Ortiz	Santa Fe	13 January 2022
5	Samia Assed	Albuquerque	28 January 2022
6	Jennifer Denetdale	Albuquerque	21 March 2022
7	Jack [pseudonym]	Albuquerque	22 March 2022
8	Jeff Haas	Santa Fe	23 March 2022
9	Linda Furham	Santa Fe	23 March 2022
10	Aaron [pseudonym]	Albuquerque	27 March 2022
11	Alejandría Lyons	Albuquerque	27 April 2022
12	Jennifer Marley	Albuquerque	5 May 2022

## Palestine

	<b>Name</b>	<b>Location</b>	<b>Date</b>
1	Tamar [pseudonym]	Ramallah	29 April 2019
2	Abbas [pseudonym]	Ramallah	22 April 2019
3	Badee Dwaik	Hebron	23 April 2019
4	Yael [pseudonym]	Beersheba	2 May 2019
5	Reem Frainah	Gaza City	13 November 2022
6	Maryam Abu Al-Ata	Gaza City	13 November 2022
7	Mahmouw Nawajaa	Ramallah	16 November 2022
8	Issa Souf	Hares	18 November 2022
9	Zainab [pseudonym]	East Jerusalem	22 November 2022
10	Mühanned Qafesha	Hebron	25 November 2022
11	Omar Amwas	Hebron/NYC	7 December 2022
12	Sherin Idais	Hebron/Kurdistan	14 December 2022
13	Ghassan Andoni	Beit Sahour	23 December 2022
14	Ali Abu Awwad	Beit Ummar	3 January 2023
15	Sahar Francis	-	4 January 2023
16	Jamal Juma'	Ramallah	10 January 2023