
Senior Projects Spring 2022

Bard Undergraduate Senior Projects

Spring 2022

Tender Inoculations

Eli Nicolaus Bickford
Bard College

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.bard.edu/senproj_s2022



Part of the [Art Practice Commons](#), and the [Other Languages, Societies, and Cultures Commons](#)



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-No Derivative Works 4.0 License](#).

Recommended Citation

Bickford, Eli Nicolaus, "Tender Inoculations" (2022). *Senior Projects Spring 2022*. 103.
https://digitalcommons.bard.edu/senproj_s2022/103

This Open Access is brought to you for free and open access by the Bard Undergraduate Senior Projects at Bard Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Senior Projects Spring 2022 by an authorized administrator of Bard Digital Commons. For more information, please contact digitalcommons@bard.edu.

Tender Inoculations

Senior Project Submitted to
The Division of Human Rights and Middle Eastern Studies
of Bard College

by

Eli Bickford

Annandale-on-Hudson, New York

May 2022

Dedication:

This project is dedicated to Sarah Ramlawi.

Acknowledgements

I would like to acknowledge the sacred land of the Munsee/Mohecanok peoples in shaping my experience at Bard College and give thanks to them and all of my human and nonhuman relatives who have made this project possible. My advisor Dina Ramadan has been an instrumental figure in my experience at Bard and has influenced me deeply. I am so thankful for my brother, mother, and father and their support. My friends have given me insight throughout this process. The trees. The rocks. The fungi. Vivien Sansour has changed my life and inspired this project. All of the people with whom I shared space in Lebanon. Um Ahmad, Abu Samir, Abu Mujahid, Imad, Zee, and many others. All of my relations in Cuba, especially Marta. I am thankful to the performers who gave their time to work with me for my performance: Hannah, Nour, Majd, Adam, and Adonis. I am forever thankful to Shahong with whom I have grown so much. I am thankful for Baxter and Marcy. I am thankful to my grandparents and my cousins. I am thankful for love that inspires action.

Table of Contents

Introduction.....	7
Chapter 1.....	12
Chapter 2.....	23
Chapter 3.....	30
Conclusion.....	49
Bibliography.....	50

Introduction

For over five centuries, colonial, capitalistic, and now neoliberal logics of extraction and consumption have driven the destruction of communities of human and more than human beings in the name of progress. As a result, the planet finds itself in the midst of crises of apocalyptic proportions; the rapid changes brought on by industrialism combined with the exploitation of the ruling classes rob humans of land based relationships which sustained them for thousands of years and leave us unable to design a future of abundance and life. In light of these crises, I believe that individuals and communities must engage in two complementary approaches toward revolution: (1) We must raise revolutionary consciousness by developing reciprocal land-based relationships with human and more than human kin which are informed by critical theory and based on indigenous knowledge and contemporary scientific data. This is a culture-change strategy by which we can assert the freedom that we do have to extract ourselves from the violent trappings of dominant systems and give communities the tools to reassert autonomy (2) Recognizing that revolution is inherently a violent process, we must support liberation movements with direct action. In this essay I will focus on the first, that of culture change. To do so I analyze the work of Palestinian revolutionary, seed saver, chef, conservationist, and artist Vivian Sansour. Sansour's work, from her performances to her daily practices serve as the inspiration for a model of political participation and revolutionary action far removed from the limitations of conventional politics. Sansour is exceptional, but it is important to note that she is not alone. All around the world, people like Sansour are refocusing us on the role of land in liberation. I have chosen to focus on Sansour because she has been instrumental in my development. The model of political engagement that she embodies is the foundation of the performance piece with mycelium, which I conducted as the second half of this thesis. Drawing

on her example, I parallel my written project with a year-long process of working with mycelium to decompose my mobile home. Throughout the following pages, I will make clear the connections between my decompositional process and Sansour's work. In homage to the way that Sansour translates her daily practice into performances and art installations, my fungal adventure culminates in a performance piece in which I will share my collaboration with mycelium with the world.

To situate Sansour's model of political engagement, I will briefly detail the circumstances in Palestine and globally which make Sansour's work so urgent. I will follow this up by situating Sansour's work within an ongoing history of revolutionary struggle.

The Crisis

Settler colonialism and white supremacy are insidious drugs, which in the case of Israel, have been combined to create the Zionist ideology. This colonial ideology weaponizes Jewish pain and suffering to justify the ethnic cleansing of the indigenous peoples of Palestine. Similar to American settler colonialism, every town, city, national park, etc. in the so-called state of Israel is made Israeli by violence and conquest against the indigenous peoples of that land. It has now been over 70 years since the Zionist militias, relying heavily on arms and training from British colonial troops, forcibly expelled over 750,000 Palestinians from their homes and lands in what is known as the Nakba. Since then, Zionist ideology and western support for it, has enabled unconscionable violence against Palestinians inside historic Palestine and in the diaspora. To consolidate control, Israel has used billions of dollars, 3.7 of which come annually from the United States, to develop a highly mechanized apartheid regime. While the term

“apartheid” helps us grasp the systematic nature of Israeli oppression, the tactics of erasure that exemplify Zionist settler colonialism go above and beyond the state’s systems of control.

Forms of violence that result from this principle are myriad. In addition to the state structures of apartheid, settler violence and international propaganda play important roles in the elimination of Palestinians and their culture. Settler colonial scholar Patrick Wolfe rightly points out that “...elimination is an organizing principle of settler-colonial society rather than a one off (and superceded) occurrence”.¹ Settler violence in the occupied Palestinian territories (oPt) is one of the most crucial components in the Zionist project of ethnic cleansing. Some examples include the fact that Israeli settlers routinely burn and mutilate Palestinian farm land to deprive Palestinians of their income and force them to relocate. “During the period from January 2021 to October 2021, Israeli settlers, under the security of the Israeli occupation Army (IOA) have violated and damaged around 20,000 trees in the occupied West Bank; by which approximately 8,000 are Olive trees.”² Settlers are often aided and protected by the Israeli Occupation Police when they commit physical harm against Palestinians. Occurrence of settler violence is daily. Cultural Appropriation is also an agent of erasure. One example that encapsulates this is described by Palestinian artist Ammany Ahmed. She describes how Israel has laws in place to restrict Palestinians foraging wild plants such as Za’atar, which is a practice integral to Palestinian culture, health, and livelihood. However, “...while preventing the indigenous population from utilizing or accessing these lands in ways that have clearly been sustainable for generations, Israel privately farms or grows these plants and brands them and sells them to

¹ Patrick Wolfe, "Settler Colonialism and the Elimination of the Native," *Journal of Genocide Research* 8, no. 4 (December 21, 2006): 388, accessed October 5, 2021, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14623520601056240>.

²The Applied Research Institute, "Unholy Communion between the Israeli Settlers and the Israeli Army to Wage War on Palestinian Olive Groves," ARIJ, last modified October 25, 2021, accessed May 4, 2022, <https://www.arj.org/latest/unholy-communion-between-the-israeli-settlers-and-the-israeli-army-to-wage-war-on-palestinian-olive-groves/>.

foreign countries and within Israel as an Israeli product.”³ Thus we can see how the international acceptance for Israeli cuisine, Israeli music, etc. plays a role in the Zionist project of erasure.

Global

In addition to the specific nature of the Israeli settler colonialism, Palestinians are affected by the global crises of capitalism, colonialism, and Western hegemony. Climate change perfectly sums up the world that has been designed by the extractive and exploitative logics of capitalism. As temperatures rise and ecosystems are more and more strained for survival, we see that the poorest peoples in the world, communities in both the global north and south are most vulnerable to these changes. In the face of the unprecedented reach of the violence of capitalism, activist and anthropologist Marisol de la Cadena posits that we must understand how the ontological and cosmological foundations of Western modernity propel us to destroy local ecologies rather than collaborate with them.⁴ Here we see that the crises of our times are driven not only by the hegemony of capitalism and colonialism but also by the ontological foundations underlying the “one world” vision of modernity.⁵ What follows is the need for system change *and* culture change. Given the ontological groundings of culture we must look for revolutionary models that teach us how to stir an internal revolution that makes us more equipped to fight the external one. Sansour is one of the agents of this change and she is a part of an important history of revolutionaries.

³ "PALESTINE IS GETTING FREE," interview by Stephen Satterfield, audio, Allied Media, June 22, 2021, accessed May 4, 2022, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GiK8oC4CxbQ>.

⁴ Marisol De la Cadena, "Uncommoning Nature," E-Flux, last modified August 22, 2015, accessed April 25, 2022, <http://supercommunity.e-flux.com/texts/uncommoning-nature/>.

⁵ De la Cadena, "Uncommoning Nature," E-Flux.

Chapter 1: Spaces of Radical Tenderness

Sansour's philosophy and practice offers a model through which we can promote culture through an this internal revolution while simultaneously participating in activities that support the external revolution. To demonstrate this, I will expand on two of three lines of thought that Sansour emphasizes in her work: (1) Tenderness with our human and nonhuman relatives allows us remake ourselves and opens new horizons for us to dream and live liberation (2) Through tender collaborations, we can heal ourselves and our communities from the traumas of Western modernity. I will conclude my thesis by discussing the ability of spaces of tenderness to make better designers of our present and future relatives. This model is the inspiration behind my performance piece entitled Tender Inoculations: A Decompositional Ceremony. For this project, I have collaborated with Oyster fungi to create an interactive experience in capitalist decomposition and to invite others to cultivate a practice of interspecies tenderness. My first chapter of this thesis is about radical tenderness and the spaces of tenderness which Sansour cultivates in her work. In chapter two, I assess how tenderness opens up pathways to individual and collective healing. In chapter three, I document and reflect on the first performance of Tender Inoculations. I analyze the successes and failures of my first performances and my plans for the second performance. Finally, in my conclusion, I discuss how tenderness unearths knowledge and practice makes us better designers of a present and future based on reciprocity, care, and love.

A growing number of artists, academics, activists, and ordinary people are integrating practices of radical care into their daily lives and their work. We see this in the rise of mutual aid networks, in the normalization of therapy and mental health support; we see this in efforts to address individual and community trauma. Radical tenderness is very closely related to these

practices of radical care insofar as the goal is “to invite a political practice of healing and wellbeing...by nurturing an affective space for confronting the complexity of the problems we are implicated in.”⁶ These words are borrowed from a text by the Gesturing Toward Decolonial Futures (GTDF) collective entitled “Co-sensing with Radical Tenderness,” which is a composed of a series of prompts intended to open the reader, the performer, the person up to tender modes of engagement. What perhaps distinguishes radical tenderness from specific models of care politics is the way that tenderness encourages us to open ourselves and all our senses to “the fact that we are part of the living metabolism of the planet”.⁷ In emphasis on metabolic engagement, a practice of radical tenderness is deeply disruptive to the dominant paradigm in which humans are separate and superior to all our other relations in “nature.”⁸ Below is the Radical Tenderness Manifesto, written by Dani D’emilia and Daniel B. Chaves in 2015.⁹ While the GTDF is not affiliated with the spaces of tenderness which Vivien Sansour cultivates, I believe that Sansour’s attachment to tenderness is born out of the same place: A recognition of the power of interspecies tenderness to stir an internal revolution which enables people to align the self and the collective with the health and wellbeing of all of our relations on earth. I have included the whole manifesto in order to contextualize the word tenderness, which I will be using throughout my thesis.

RADICAL TENDERNESS IS ...

A living manifesto written by Dani d’Emilia and Daniel B. Chávez

radical tenderness is to be critical and loving, at the same time

radical tenderness is to understand how to use strength as a caress

⁶ Gesturing Toward Decolonial Futures, ed., “Co-sensing With Radical Tenderness Deck of Cards,” Decolonial Futures, accessed April 6, 2022, <https://decolonialfutures.net/radicaltenderness/>.

⁷ Gesturing Toward Decolonial Futures, “Co-sensing With,” Decolonial Futures.

⁸ De la Cadena, “Uncommoning Nature,” E-Flux.

⁹ Dani d’Emilia and Daniel B. Chavez, “RADICAL TENDERNESS MANIFESTO,” DANI D’EMILIA, last modified July 2015, accessed May 4, 2022, [https://danidemilia.com/radical-tenderness/#:~:text=The%20Radical%20Tenderness%20Manifesto%20\(2015,communities%2C%20and%20our%20interpersonal%20relationships%3F](https://danidemilia.com/radical-tenderness/#:~:text=The%20Radical%20Tenderness%20Manifesto%20(2015,communities%2C%20and%20our%20interpersonal%20relationships%3F).

radical tenderness is to know how to accompany one another, among friends and lovers, at different distances and speeds

radical tenderness is writing this text at the same time, from two faraway continents

...from the same bed

writing whilst caressing

radical tenderness is to know to say “no”

is to carry the weight of another body as if it were your own

...is to share sweat with a stranger

radical tenderness is to dance among dissident bodies in a workshop

...to be completely overwhelmed and maintain our smiles and celebrations

radical tenderness is to allow yourself to be seen; to allow yourself to be taken

radical tenderness is to not collapse in the face of our contradictions

radical tenderness is to not allow our existential demons to become permanent cynicism

it is to not always be the same, las mismas, los mismos, les mimes

is to embody In Lak'ech

because *you are my other me*

and vice versa

radical tenderness is to not be afraid of fear

radical tenderness is to live ephemeral love

is to invent other temporalities

radical tenderness is to embrace fragility

is to confront others' neurosis with creativity

radical tenderness is to embody performative gestures that you would normally reject

radical tenderness is to assume leadership when your community asks it of you, although you may not know what to do, or how to do it!

radical tenderness is to lend your guts to others

is to wear your lover's pussy as a beard

is to risk loving against the grain

radical tenderness is to believe in the architecture of affects

is to find one another from the muscles closest to the bone

is to believe in the political effect of internal movements

radical tenderness is to not insist on being the center of attention

is to have peripheral vision; to believe in what cannot be seen

radical tenderness is to turn a tremor into a dance and a sigh into a mantra

is to dissent with maximum respect

...to transit in spaces you do not understand

radical tenderness is to accept the ambiguous

is to not initiate all thought by navel gazing

is to break with affective patterns, without clear expectations

radical tenderness is to share dreams, wildness

to tune in with, not just empathize with

it is to find a galaxy in the eyes of another and not break the gaze

to read the body of another as a palimpsest

radical tenderness is to channel irresistible energies and convert them into untamable embodiments

is to activate sensorial memory

is to recognize the other by their scent

radical tenderness is to feel the possibility in every doubt

is to allow yourself to be pierced by the unknown

radical tenderness is to give a narcissist the option of adapting or rethinking their position

radical tenderness is to embrace thorns

radical tenderness is to coexist with lack

is to face things head on by looking at them from the love of wanting to see

is to sustain ourselves from distinct places though not all of them are 'beautiful'

radical tenderness is a concept that is appropriable and ever-changing

radical tenderness is something

that is not necessary

to define

Radical tenderness is a term that we discovered through working as part of the performance collective la pocha nostra. As performance artists and educators ex-members of the troupe, with this manifesto we want to honor its origin and its continuous reverberation in projects we are engaged with around the globe. This version was created through an online poetic jam started in 2015, as part of Dani's research on radical tenderness within the context of her MA at the independent studies program (MACBA, Barcelona). we asked ourselves: what does radical tenderness mean for us, in our lives and work within and outside of Ipn? Can tenderness be radical? Can radical be tender? We wish to thank all who have been part of this journey with us, particularly the founders of la pocha nostra who began using the term in the 90s, the various artists that have worked with the troupe throughout the years and all who have participated in

the multiple performance-pedagogy workshops in which we have been able to explore radical tenderness from different perspectives and practices. ___ Dani and Daniel are performance artists, transfeminist activists and educators. Since meeting in 2011 they have collaborated on several transcontinental performance and pedagogical projects as core members of La Pocha Nostra until 2016 (Dani from 2011, daniel from 2014) and proyecto inmiscuir between 2015-17. www.danidemilia.com / www.dccperformance.com¹⁰

In 2018, Sansour was the first landscape resident at the Dar Yusef Nasri Jacir for Art and Research which is an art space in Bethlehem, Palestine. In the abandoned terraces of the Jacir home, Sansour set out to, “create a plot that represents the beauty of the feeling of safety and home in the midst of this area right by the [Israeli apartheid] wall where a lot of confrontations happen.”¹¹ Working with international and local volunteers, Sansour cleared the area of glass, tear gas canisters, and other evidence of abuse and planted an entire terrace full of heirloom Mloukheyeh, a plant in the mallow family, that is the main ingredient in a staple stew across the Levant. After the Mloukeyeh had grown for a few months, Sansour held a workshop where about 20 participants harvested the mallow stems and collectively took apart the leaves to prepare the plant for a home cooked stew from Sansour’s traveling kitchen.¹² Here we see some key ingredients of GTDF’s radical tenderness such as “to invent other temporalities,” “live ephemeral love,” and “to not collapse in the face of your contradictions” along with many others.¹³ This practice gives participants an opportunity to embody a way of being which is considered useless,

¹⁰ d'Emilia and Chavez, "RADICAL TENDERNESS," DANI D'EMILIA.

¹¹ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XoexxUOeZak>, produced by Al Jazeera, 2018, Youtube, 12:45 - 13:07.

¹² Dar Jacir, "Home by Vivien Sansour," Dar Yusef Nasri Jacir for Art and Research, last modified October 16, 2018, accessed May 4, 2022, <https://darjacir.com/home>.

¹³ d'Emilia and Chavez, "RADICAL TENDERNESS," DANI D'EMILIA.

primitive, outdated within the dominant narrative that tells indigenous peoples that the ways of their ancestors are worthless. Yet by carving out time and energy to gather in tenderness with this tradition, participants are reminded of the sensorial memory of thriving in communities rather than facing constant threat and repression.

The tenderness Sansour cultivated with participants in the terraces of Dar Jacir can be understood in relation to the concept of the commons-as-praxis, which was coined and developed by black radical scholar Monica White in her book *Freedom Farmers: Agricultural Resistance and the Black Freedom Movement*.¹⁴ Writing about black farming cooperatives in the southern United States following reconstruction, White demonstrates how these groups created common spaces for meeting, mutual aid, and other types of organizing which allowed participants to access freedoms inaccessible to them in any other place in the south at that time.¹⁵ By using the commons as a place to embody liberation, Sansour offers participants a chance to make community on their own terms, outside of the forces that dispossesses Palestinians from their lands and the ability to craft their own narratives. Today most of the world's population depends on unhealthy and unjust food systems fueled by monopoly capital and oppressive regimes. Nowhere is this more evident than in Palestine, where the injustice of dominant systems such as neoliberalism is harder to resist because of the ongoing occupation of Palestinians lands by the Israeli state.¹⁶ With regard to food, food sovereignty writer and activist Leila el-Haddad documents how many Palestinians rely on food imports from the same people that seek to destroy them.¹⁷ In the context of near total lack of Palestinian food and political sovereignty,

¹⁴ Monica M. White, *Freedom Farmers: Cultural Resistance and Black Freedom Movement* (Chapel Hill, USA: The University of North Carolina Press, 2019).

¹⁵ White, *Freedom Farmers*, 5-13.

¹⁶ Al Haq, comp., *Business and Human Rights in Palestine*, 13, December 7, 2016, accessed May 4, 2022, <https://www.alhaq.org/publications/8063.html>.

¹⁷ "Food Sovereignty | Panel Discussion | Palestine Writes 2020," video, 1:15:27, YouTube, posted by Palestine Writes, December 2020, accessed April 6, 2022, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cd48MufilZ0&t=2100s>.

Sansour's use of the commons-as-praxis shifts our understanding of how politics functions and affirms a lesson from the black radical tradition: "freedom is a place."¹⁸ During the event, participants shared their memories and stories of home and what home means to them.¹⁹ By collectively rehabilitating the Jacir terraces, supporting Mloukheyeh from seed to harvest, and then gathering to celebrate the interconnection between plant, place, and Palestinian belonging, Sansour facilitated a reclamation of home and of food sovereignty. The blossoming of lush green stems in the Dar Jacir terrace which had been abandoned for so long "declares we are home" in "a global system that is constantly telling us that we're not worth anything, that what we have is not worth anything."²⁰

For the next example of Sansour's spaces of tenderness I will focus on the Palestine Heirloom Seed Library (PHSL) and the Traveling Kitchen which are Sansour's largest continuous projects to date. Sansour originally began to collect heirloom seeds as a way to address the grief that she felt as a result of losing the spaces of tenderness that had raised her. Her childhood village of Beit Jala has transformed within her lifetime from a lush biodiverse rural village to a "cement cemetery inside an Israeli prison."²¹ While working with farmers in the north Palestine in her twenties she "found this tenderness in seeds," specifically heirloom varieties of Palestinian crops, many of which have disappeared from the daily lives of Palestinians.²² The Ba'al seeds, for example, are a family of heirloom seeds that have been developed for thousands of years to produce crops without irrigation. Conservering, sharing, and listening to these seeds allows participants in Sansour's work to access the science and artistry of

¹⁸ Nick Estes, *Our History Is the Future: Standing Rock versus the Dakota Access Pipeline, and the Long Tradition of Indigenous Resistance* (London: Verso, 2019), Conclusion.

¹⁹ Dar Jacir, "Home by Vivien," Dar Yusef Nasri Jacir for Art and Research.

²⁰ "Food Sovereignty," video.

²¹ "Food Sovereignty," video.

²² "Seed Conservation; Creating New Worlds," video, 1:49:51, YouTube, posted by SoA-RPI Events, October 2021, accessed April 6, 2022, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=o-G6hi5X6W0>.

generations of Palestinian farmers who existed symbiotically with their particular microclimates.²³ The work of the PHSL consists of tracking down these seeds, which are often found in the tin cans on the shelves and cabinets of grandmothers and grandfathers in villages around Palestine. Sansour and other farmers will then cultivate and share these heirloom seeds so that more and more people can enter into tender relationships with them. The PHSL is distinct from other seed banks in Palestine and beyond because it does not strive to be an institution that guards Palestinian heritage.²⁴ Rather, the PHSL helps to cultivating a “community of people who want to be in communion together and who want to connect to who they are and who have fallen in love with things from their childhoods and the people who miss the cooking of their grandparents, people who still love to sit for 15 minutes watching a cicada.”²⁵ I include this quotation in entirety because romanticism is fundamental to the power of spaces of tenderness.

The Traveling Kitchen brings this tenderness to people who may not be involved in the agricultural projects of the PHSL. This compact kitchen, which fits into Sansour’s car, allows Sansour to share the delicious, nutritious offspring of these seeds via home cooked meals in different communities around Palestine and beyond. Whether participants are passing by or there intentionally, the Traveling Kitchen allows Sansour to expand the tenderness of heirloom seeds to a broader community. These spaces invite people to live within the connections between place and people and thus offer an embodied experience of what freedom can look like. These spaces connect people to each other and to their ecosystems in ways that cultivate a “living community” within the ruins of modernity.²⁶ Spaces of tenderness orient us away from the limitations of the

²³ "Seed Conservation," video.

²⁴ "Vivien Sansour," interview by Airgo, SoundCloud, last modified August 20, 2019, accessed May 4, 2022, <https://soundcloud.com/airgoradio/ep-202-vivien-sansour>.

²⁵ "Vivien Sansour," interview, SoundCloud.

²⁶ "Vivien Sansour," interview, SoundCloud.

conventional models of resistance and teach us that liberation is a daily practice of living the world we want to see.

Fungal Tenderness:

Sansour's work to expand spaces of tenderness resonates deeply with the ways in which I was brought into relationship with fungi and how I have come to view them as revolutionary collaborators. I grew up with an intense physical and spiritual connection to the rivers, mountains, and valleys of the Adirondack park, in the historic hunting grounds of the Mohawk and Abenaki peoples. Although I would only spend about three months a year there, all of my most vivid memories come from the magic of that place. As I grew older and I came into my political and social consciousness, I distanced myself from those northern boreal forests under the impression that the social change I wished to be a part of moved outward from urban spaces. However, as I organized in the city, I found that cement and consumerism reinforced the Western ontological separation between nature and human and was void of an ecological inspiration that had been so important to me as a child.²⁷ Even as I found community in my organizing networks, I started to feel the intense species loneliness that characterizes our time.

Over the last five years, three types of inputs have brought me back into the forests of my youth by demonstrating that only the generosity and tenderness of creation can generate freedom dreams with the power to truly liberate us from hegemonic systems. The wisdom of my grandparents and of older people in general constitutes the first input that did this for me. Through countless nights of conversations with these friends, I came to understand that revolution was as subjective as the people who spent their lives fighting for them. These elders have taught me how to integrate that subjectivity into my own dreams of liberation. The second input was

²⁷ De la Cadena, "Uncommoning Nature," E-Flux.

from bipoc and queer scholars who showed me normative culture weaponizes our bodies and minds to further the “one world vision” of western modernity.²⁸ Revolutionaries such as Tara Houski, Robin Kimmerer, Robin D.G. Kelley, Bell Hooks, Nick Estes, Noura Erekat, Vivien Sansour, George Jackson, and many others showed me that revolution is within us and that, as we are of nature, our movements must be grounded in reciprocity with the land. As these inputs humbled me, I felt invited to consider, dream, and live visions of liberation which went beyond conventional tactics of resistance. Out of this contemplation, I came to embrace a third input, one which had always been there for me: The white pines, spring wildflowers, roaring rivers, and ancient mountains of the Adirondacks.

When Covid-19 hit my friend Shahong and I moved from Lebanon to the Adirondacks. It was the end of my junior year and the beginning of a new relationship with my home. My bond with the plants, rocks, birds, winds, and trees deepened as I found myself in a daily conversation with the seasons. As a rock climber, I noticed that climbing was becoming a spiritual experience where I was able to be purely present with all of creation. Over a year and half, Shahong and I worked on various farms, frolicked, climbed, and came to realize that our freedom dreams were being profoundly informed by the tenderness of the woods.

²⁸ De la Cadena, "Uncommoning Nature," E-Flux.

Chapter 2: Healing

In the previous chapter, I argued that Sansour's use of rituals, such as cooking, preparing food, feasting, planting, etc. create spaces of tenderness in order to reestablish the commons as a place to embody modes of being which liberate us from the constraints of normative culture. In this section, I assert that tenderness with each other, our human and nonhuman relations, is a methodology that opens up space to heal our internal and our external realities from the traumas of dominant systems. This may seem so obvious that it does not warrant a chapter. However, Sansour's work with heirloom seeds demonstrates the way that tenderness can be a tool for transformative justice and healing. Heirloom seeds are the products of ancient relationships between indigenous peoples and their lands; the artistry, care, and scientific knowledge which produced these crops is carried in the DNA of these seeds. Yet the rarity of these varieties around the world, compared to the diversity that once was, is a reflection of the violence of Western imperialism, global capitalism, and now neoliberalism which has waged war on indigenous worlds and world making practices.²⁹ From the Spanish outlawing of Amaranth in the 16th century to the Israeli outlawing of Palestinian foraging today, the forces that uphold Western modernity seek to destroy the symbiosis between indigenous peoples and their lands and thus make resistance impossible. By weaving in the work of Sansour and others, such as Rowan White, who collaborate with heirloom seeds in order to heal people from the trauma of this experience, I assert that tenderness is part of a decolonial methodology. By creating spaces of

²⁹ De la Cadena, "Uncommoning Nature," E-Flux.

tenderness through which we enable seeds, spores, and people can grow and perform, we can revitalize rituals with land and community that emphasize health, wellbeing, and interdependence. In this section, I will discuss how tenderness can promote internal healing between and among all peoples and external healing of land and body.

The PHSL arose in response to Sansour's realization that, "with each crop comes a cultural practice, and with the disappearance of a variety comes the loss of these practices... This is important because within these narratives is the essence of who we are; we need to create conscious visions about who we want to be, both individually and in the world."³⁰ The Jedu'i Watermelon was one of the first seeds that Sansour sought out. In the years prior to the founding of the PHSL, countless farmers told Sansour stories about giving birth in the Jedu'i fields, hiding among them during war, or guarding them under beds so that they would stay fresh until the winter.³¹ This drought resistant crop, part of the Ba'al lineage, however, was talked about as if it no longer existed. When Sansour, finally tracked down the seed, the farmer who had was enthusiastic about her interested in it because he said that no one wanted it. This represented, for Sansour, the greatest victory of colonialism, which is to teach the people that where they came from, what they had, was worthless. So the work of the PHSL is not only to save and spread these seeds to promote food sovereignty. The work of the PHSL equips Palestinians and allies with the tools to reclaim the land based relationships which colonialism has tried to sever so in order to heal land and culture from the traumas of Western modernity.

Americans need only look at our own histories to see the disastrous outcome of these forces and the necessity of tender spaces to heal. In a chapter of *Braiding Sweetgrass* entitled

³⁰JENNIFER HIGGIE, "Writer and Activist Vivien Sansour on Food, Farming, Heritage and Healing," Frieze, last modified August 19, 2019, accessed May 4, 2022, <https://www.frieze.com/article/writer-and-activist-vivien-sansour-food-farming-heritage-and-healing>.

³¹ "Seed Conservation," video.

“Learning the Grammar of Animacy,” Robin Kimmerer discusses how 500 years of land theft, forced assimilation, and genocidal violence on Turtle Island have left a total of nine fluent speakers of the Potowotomi language.³² This language, similar to heirloom crops, contains a grammar, vocabulary, and vernacular that was born out of generations of tenderness and rootedness between Anishinabe people and their lands. However, the lessons embedded in language and seed are muted when they have no space to teach, no one to speak through, and no one willing to learn. Carving out spaces of tenderness where we may open our senses to these lessons is made more urgent by the fact that normative Western culture rests upon an ontological separation between nature and human. Simply by living “normally,” we are brought away from tenderness relationships which might lead us into healthy relationships with our human and nonhuman relatives.³³ Radical tenderness allows us to disrupt this foundation and learn again to be in relation with all our human and non human relatives. It creates spaces to revitalize the languages of animacy in seed, soil, fungi which contains the knowledge of place necessary to heal.

Since its founding in 2014, Sansour and others have transformed the home of the PHSL in Battir, Palestine, into a lush biodiverse space which preserves, showcases, and distributes over 70 varieties of heirloom crops. A tour around Palestinian farms today demonstrates the exceptional nature of this work. The neoliberal economy and Israeli occupation has given rise to the dominance of cash crops and monoculture farming. With a lack of biodiversity, an emphasis on GMO seeds and toxic fertilizers and pesticides, the soils which would otherwise offer tender experiences are degraded and dominated by crops, which Sansour calls poison.³⁴ In this context,

³² Robin Wall Kimmerer, *Braiding Sweetgrass* (Minneapolis, MN: Milkweed Editions, 2015), 163.

³³ De la Cadena, "Uncommoning Nature," E-Flux. Neel Ahuja, "Intimate Atmospheres: Queer Theory in a Time of Extinctions," *Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 21, nos. 2-3 (June 2015): 167, accessed April 25, 2022, <https://doi.org/10.1215/10642684-2843227>.

³⁴ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XoexxUOeZak>, produced by Al Jazeera, 2018, Youtube.

the PHSL terraces offer a space for sensorial education where Palestinians and allies can learn how to heal mind and body with the wisdom embedded in heirloom crops.³⁵ Similarly, Mirna Bamieh, the founder of the Palestine Hostine Society which hosts events that highlight the richness of traditional Palestinian cuisine, is drawn to rituals around traditional cuisine for its power to heal. Bamieh finds that preparing meals that were born out of a specific village or region in Palestine but which are no longer part of the normal Palestine menu creates tender spaces for participants to heal from the colonial experience through reclamation.³⁶ Tenderness with traditional recipes and the local ingredient which make them provides a methodology to resuscitate and revitalize these treasured dishes and create new stories which moves culture forward and back into an embrace of the artistry and science of indigenous knowledge and tradition.

In the first year of the PHSL, Sansour and others worked with teachers in Palestine to assign their students the task of asking their grandparents to tell them stories of traditional agricultural practices and the heirloom seeds that used to be in circulation. These assignments, workshops, and other events that the PHSL have done since attempt to show younger generations that their ancestors understood that beauty was made in relation to the land; That, contrary to the colonial narrative that what” native peoples had is worth nothing,” ancestors who were rooted to their lands were scientists and artists who worked with their microclimates, soils, and seeds to create magic which sustained their communities.³⁷ Given the power of the system to separate the peoples from their histories, this work to reconnect Palestinians with their past is a healing practice. Through the El Beir Arts and Seed center, the PHSL hosts workshops, lectures, and other events to educate through tenderness the power of seeds to teach Palestinians where they

³⁵ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XoexxUOeZak>, produced by Al Jazeera, 2018, Youtube.

³⁶ "Food Sovereignty," video.

³⁷ "Food Sovereignty," video.

came from.³⁸ Sansour reflects on the way that kids change when they connect the beauty of heirloom crops with their ancestors. Learning that their ancestors gave the world domesticated wheat and therefore bread, biscuits, and cake, gives young people a sense of self and pride in a world that tells them they are worth nothing.³⁹

The healing power of seeds also goes beyond indigenous communities as Mohawk seed saver, Rowan White, has learned over twenty years of work in seed rematriation. White says, “When an Indigenous community works together in collaboration with an institution, or an organization, or a group of people that ancestrally were their adversaries—when they work together with seeds at the center, there is an immense amount of intergenerational healing that happens.”⁴⁰ This presents another dimension of healing that happens through tenderness. Through the PHSL and the Traveling Kitchen, Sansour offers lectures, workshops, and other events all over the world in addition to events based from the library’s home in Battir, Palestine. These events help expand the reach of the wisdom embodied in these seeds. Aside from encouraging funding for the important work of the PHSL, these events create a basis for reparative justice between communities who have historically propelled the violence against Palestinians. Galvanized by wisdom of seeds, these events provide an opportunity for foreigners to learn from the wisdom of Palestinian agriculture. This builds new communities through tenderness on the ruins of late stage capitalism, which can collaborate on equal footing to heal land from the trauma of global capitalist domination over the land.

³⁸ "Vivien Sansour," interview, SoundCloud.

³⁹ "Vivien Sansour," interview, SoundCloud.

⁴⁰ Gosia Rokicka, "Decolonizing seeds and the feminine side of things—a conversation with Rowen White," Permaculture Women, accessed May 4, 2022, <https://www.permaculturewomen.com/decolonizing-seeds/>.

Fungal Healing:

The idea that heirloom crops can teach us who we were and help us understand ourselves better in the world translates well to the fungal kingdom. Fungi are in fact far older than the first terrestrial plants and more closely related to humans than any other kingdom. For millennia, people have foraged mushrooms for food and medicine. Anthropologist Anna Tsing has documented how mushrooms have long sustained people on the fringes of the empire, indigenous and not.⁴¹ While there is a prevailing and irrational fear of mushrooms that exists around the world, which has its roots in the connections between christianity and Western science, fungi literally feed the world. Here on Turtle Island, there are also bonds between fungi and indigenous peoples that must be rewoven, which I am only beginning to learn about. Growing up in the United States, the contradictions between the narrative of American exceptionalism and the criminality of the American healthcare system and culture always seemed to be one of the most glaring examples of incompatibility of capitalism with life. While my parents could afford insurance, many of my peers refused to go to the doctors or seek out the treatments that they needed because they could not afford it. As I became more observant of the forest's generosity, I felt the power of an ontological shift deep within. I have never been particularly thoughtful with regards to gift giving and showing up for my loved ones. Yet, as I felt myself deeping into the circle, I realized that that the forest was dethroning some of the very foundations through which I understood healing. Fungi, mountain air, plant, and animal relatives opened me to other ways to think about health. In conjunction with the wisdom of my older friends and the scholarship of an ever growing bibliography, the boreal forests of the Adirondacks were unearthing lessons of reciprocity and care from deep within my cellular

⁴¹ Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing, *The Mushroom at the End of the World: On the Possibility of Life in Capitalist Ruins*, 2015 ed. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2021), Introduction.

memory. I began to make medicines for friends and families from plants and mushrooms which are known to be medicinal. *Inonotus obliquus* or Chaga is a type of fungi which has been used for centuries to improve immunity, decrease inflammation, and now to fight cancers of the lung, breast, colon, and prostate.⁴² *Ganoderma Lingzhi* or Reishi which has long been used in Eastern medicine has similar properties.⁴³ *Heridium erinaceus* or Lion's mane fungi has been shown to improve memory and is being studied as a treatment for Alzheimers.⁴⁴

Around this time I was getting ready to leave the Adirondacks to start my senior year at Bard. I bought a camper to save money on rent and I spent a few weekends driving from home to home near Bard asking if I could park my camper on the owners' land. Finally, I found a couple, who on the day that I knocked on the door had just had a baby, Faylum. Once I moved into my camper, I immediately realized that it needed to be disposed of. The walls were rotting, the floor was caving in, and it smelled slightly of black mold. Although I was committed to living in the camper for my senior year, I saw an interesting opportunity unfold before me. I understood the camper to be exemplary of capitalist manufactured waste, the destiny of which lay in a landfill only contributing to the further degradation of the planet. However, I had learned in books by Paul Stamets that certain types of mycelium have the ability to detoxify the matter that they colonize by breaking down hydrocarbons.⁴⁵ A mycoremediation study that used Oyster mushroom mycelium to detoxify a piece of ground that was saturated with petroleum demonstrated that they could be engaged with as allies to heal entire ecosystems.⁴⁶ The fast growing world of mycoremediation demonstrates that many different species of fungi can repair

⁴² Paul Stamets, *Mycelium Running: How Mushrooms Can Help save the World* (Berkeley: Ten Speed Press, 2005), 256.

⁴³ Stamets, *Mycelium Running*, 231.

⁴⁴ Stamets, *Mycelium Running*, 245.

⁴⁵ Stamets, *Mycelium Running*, 11.

⁴⁶ Stamets, *Mycelium Running*, Introduction.

contamination sights by consuming hydrocarbons in the forms of heavy metals, plastics, etc.⁴⁷

With the example of Sansour's work with seeds to create spaces of tenderness in order to expand the power of the earth to liberate and heal us, I embarked on a performance piece to compost my home with fungi.

Chapter 3: Tender Inoculations

Idea

Create an interactive experience to facilitate interspecies tenderness with fungi by designing a ceremony to decompose my camper with Oyster mushrooms.

Process.

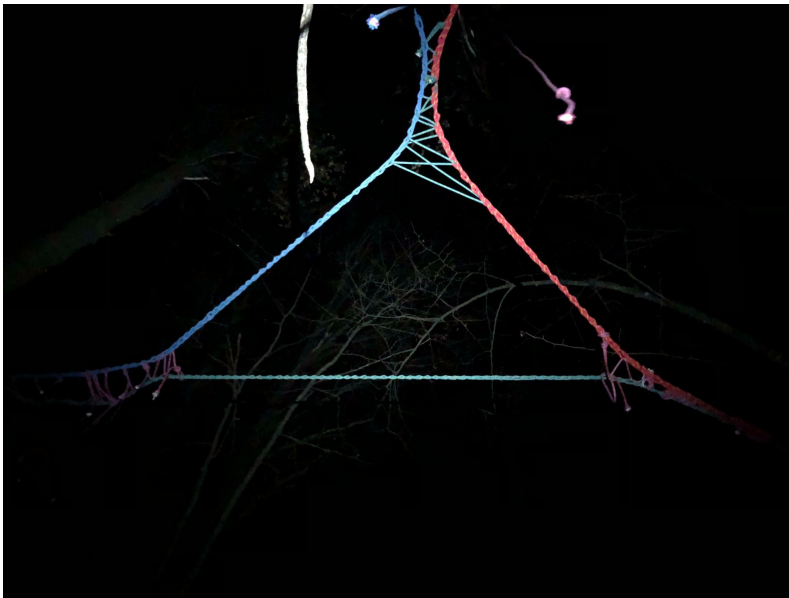
In the fall of 2021, I began to work on staging a space for my tender inoculation performance. The first step in this process was to begin constructing giant nets in the trees above the clearing where I would do the performance. I began to reach out to climbing clubs, gyms, former climbing partners, and guiding services to see if they would donate retired climbing ropes for the project. At first the process was slow going but soon ropes were coming in every day until I had about seventy-five 180ft ropes which is about 13,500ft of climbing rope. With not experience building nets but years of climbing experience, I began to frame the nets by ascending each tree and building the frame about 25ft in the air. This process was incredibly long and tiring, even though I loved every minute of it. I have calculated that I spent a combined time

⁴⁷ Stamets, *Mycelium Running*, 89.

of 168 hours dangling, swinging, flopping, and balancing on single strands of the nets as I worked on them.



Once the frame was finished, I began to weave the first of three sections of the nets. I had no idea how to do this so the first net I wove was loose and sloppy.



This was the beginning of the first section. The sides of this are 15ft by 15ft by 15ft.

By the winter I had completed two of three sections and by this time I could spend hours in the nets without a harness. In relationship to this process, I began to realize that the slow pace of construction was allowing me to get to know the space really well. While the nets were

originally intended to be a larger than life representation of a mycelial net, they evolved into a tender space through which to be and work with the ecosystem where my camper is parked and where I live.

By the beginning of April, I had finished the nets. Its 45ft by 15ft (20ft in some places).



The final section, which is made of orange and turquoise ropes (nearest to the camera), was the cleanest as I had learned how to efficiently weave nets at this point.

Camper Demolition:

Starting in the winter I began to demolish cabinets and interior walls of my camper with a wood shredder. This was tiring work because I bought an electric wood shredder that would only

accept small pieces of wood so I would have to continuously cut the larger pieces with a circular saw in order to fit them into the shredder. This process has taken about four hours every week since I began shredding in March. Unfortunately, I have no photos of this process.

To supplement the shredded material, I have bought two truckloads of hard wood chips in order to have enough material to fill thirty five sandbags to make a barracks beneath the nets.

Layout of the Performance:

Participants arrive onto the land and the first thing they see is a table covered in a set of cards made by the Gesturing Toward Decolonial Futures collective (GTDF) which are a series of prompts to invite a practice of radical tenderness.





One of the performers tells participants to read the cards, enter my camper, and explore the space in the fifteen minutes before the performance begins.

In the camper there is an audio loop playing different selections of interviews by Vivien Sansour.

At 5:15, I gather all of the participants in front of my camper and introduce myself, give a land acknowledgement, and describe the layout of the performance:



The first stage of the performance will be familiarizing participants with how to mycelium by showing them how to inoculate a recently fallen tree with Oyster mycelium. Then there will be a ten minute transition before the ceremony begins. During this transition, we invite you to take one card from the table and use it as a prompt to acquaint yourselves with one plant. When this is over we invite you to enter the clearing in front of the barracks and the nets and mingle with each other before the ceremony begins. I will then give a speech that will be followed by the ceremony. We will then say some closing remarks, open up the nets, and conclude the performance.

Part one:

Each performer brings a group to one of three logs that I have suspended in the air. Using drills and Oyster plug spawn, these performers will show the participants how to drill holes into the wood and fill it with mushroom spawn in order to encourage mushroom growth from said tree. Each participant gets a chance to drill and inoculate.

While performers are in their groups, I will be cooking Oyster mushrooms and bringing the pan between the groups to smell and taste the fruits of their labor.



Transition:

Getting to know a plant with the Radical Tenderness cards



Ceremony:

After the ceremony, participants gather in the clearing in front of the camper. After about 5 minutes of mingling I begin my speech.



Speech:

We stand in front of sandbags filled with a mixture of hard wood chips and shredded up cabinets and interior walls of my camper. Later in the speech, I'll explain the significance of this material and the fungal collaborations to come but to start let me call attention to the barracks which here because we are on the front lines of a war, one which has raged for over 500 years of brutal conquest in the name of Western modernity and white supremacy, in the name of capitalism and colonialism.⁴⁸

⁴⁸ De la Cadena, "Uncommoning Nature," E-Flux.

In this paradigm, normal life is built on the theft of native land, the exploitation of enslaved labor, and the hijacking of the life-giving capacity of the earth to enrich a few and oppress the rest.⁴⁹

The scars of this war are everywhere. From the reservations, ghettos, the missing and murdered indigenous women to the strip mines and clear cut forests.

This war is the foundation of our “modern” existence.

Now, revolutionaries past and present have given us the gift of many lessons on how we might best resist. And some of the best among them have shown us that the external revolution, that is the process by which we restore just relations with the earth and with all our human and nonhuman relations, is made possible only through an internal revolution, one in which we transform ourselves through poetry: the poetry of the people and the soil in order to open our minds to forms of freedom beyond the limitations of our systems.

I want to tell you a story about my journey with this poetry, which just like all of us is a work in progress.

To do this I need to bring y’all back to my time in Lebanon. The truth is I can’t do justice to what Lebanon was for me so i’ll share four scenes.

⁴⁹ De la Cadena, "Uncommoning Nature," E-Flux. Al Haq, *Business and Human*, 169.

Lebanon was a night in Trablus two weeks after the October revolution had begun, feeling the vibrations beneath my feet of hundreds of thousands of people dancing, singing, and crying for revolution.

Lebanon was gossiping with Um Ahmad in her cramped shop in the Shatila refugee camp almost every night, getting to the very core of existence while somehow discussing nothing in particular.

Lebanon was cooking Ma'loube with my friend Imad in the empty cement shell of the building where he was squatting with about thirty other Syrian refugees

Lebanon was playing chess with Abu Samir in his one room Museum of Memories, a collection consisting of keys, thobes, yokes, coins, and other objects which Palestinians brought with them as they were forced to flee their homes on foot in 1948.

The people with whom I shared space in Lebanon shook me to my core and taught me that resistance is incomplete without imagination, that we need it to be able to dream of and live freedom beyond the limitations of our systems because these dreams are the seeds whose offspring are capable of nourishing and guiding the revolution.

In the chaos of the first weeks of the pandemic, my friend Shahong and I decided to move to my grandmother's unwinterized cabin on the snowy side of a mountain in the Mohawk library now called the Adirondack park. And in a blink of an eye Lebanon was worlds away and we began a new chapter to the pace of the changing seasons but the result my experience adjacent to the

Lebanese revolutionary movement and the Syrians and Palestinians with whom I lived was that I was entering the woods in search of ways to free my imagination from the logics of our systems.

Shahong was the first person who showed me how to forage mushrooms, having learned from her father.

And as I was first becoming obsessed with the world of fungi, I was struck by how useful they could be in a revolutionary practice.

I learned how certain species of fungi can break down toxins such as heavy metals, PCBs, even plastics and compost the waste of capitalism, which is the science behind this ceremony.⁵⁰

I learned that integrating mushrooms and plants into a practice of self and community care is an act of creation that delegitimizes the capitalist logics of the agriculture and healthcare systems.⁵¹

And finally, through taste I learned that edible mushrooms are divine. And given their nutrition, resilience, and speed of growth it was easy for me to see how we might use fungi in the pursuit of food sovereignty.

But the more time I spent with the woods, the more the woods pointed me toward the work of indigenous land and water protectors for guidance on how I, as a settler, could ethically navigate

⁵⁰ Stamets, *Mycelium Running*, 89.

⁵¹ Kimmerer, *Braiding Sweetgrass*, Honorable Harvest.

this earth which we've all inherited. And from these conversations with the woods, I began to see fungi as relatives and potential collaborators rather than tools.

When you enter a forest with humility, on a fall morning after a night of rain as the fog blanket is lifting to wake up thousands of mushrooms, you find yourself brushing up against the sentience, the animacy of all our relations.

And in these tender spaces, I started to see how fungi were stirring that internal revolution. Fungi were rewiring how I think about death, how I think about gender,⁵² how I think about symbiosis and mutual aid, and thus, were expanding the horizons of how I could dream, fight for, and live liberation.

With fungi leading the way, I felt that the false separation between Nature and the Human, which really lies at the very heart of how settler societies like ours come to know the world, was dissolving into the truth of interdependence.⁵³

And it became clear, perhaps for the first time, what it meant that our indigenous siblings, who make up only 5% of the global population, are protecting over 80% of the planet's biodiversity.

If your humanity is contingent on the health of all our relations, if the rivers, peoples, fungi, trees, birds, rocks are relatives and the cities, the forests, the valleys that host us are the

⁵² episode 262, "Dr. PATRICIA KAISHIAN on Queer Mycology," December 1, 2021, in *For the Wild*, podcast, audio, 1:09:00.

⁵³ De la Cadena, "Uncommoning Nature," E-Flux.

commons, how can their destruction their extraction, and exploitation be a part of something called progress.⁵⁴

It was at this moment, this wonderfully exciting time in my life, that I reconnected with the work of Vivian Sansour, a Palestinian artist, a conservationist, and revolutionary who has a profound, contagious trust that when peoples reclaim the land based relationships which colonialism has severed and revitalize the wisdom which allowed our ancestors to live for thousands of years with their soils and forests, a form of poetry is born that contains the recipes of liberation.

Sansour's work with seeds has not only inspired this performance but inspired a total shift in life practice. Because Sansour works with communities and ancient seeds to write this liberation poetry, to support a living culture rather than one of scarcity which our systems propel. Because contrary to the dominant narrative of indigenous backwardness and primitivism, seeds like Abu Samra, the dark and handsome wheat and the Judu'i watermelon which grow without irrigation evidence of the artistry, science, and magic with which Sansour's ancestors cared for their soils and communities for countless generations.

Through tender collaborations with ancient, Sansour excavates and revitalizes the knowledge which has been buried by generations of colonialism and capitalism but which allows us to imagine a different world and create it in the present.

⁵⁴ Winona LaDuke, *All Our Relations: Native Struggles for Land and Life* (Chicago, IL: Haymarket Books, 2015), Conclusion.

So right around the time that I bought this camper and moved back to this magical valley carved by Muh-he-kun-ne-tuk, the river that flows both ways, as I was experiencing the power of fungi to disrupt the paradigm, to stir an internal revolution, Sansour's projects, performances, just her daily practice led me to a model through which I might attempt to share and expand that power.

At its core, this model is about tenderness. By creating spaces of tenderness from which to collaborate with our human and non human relatives, we break down the internal walls that blind us to the evil of real ones. Because in this region of warm friction where we rub against other ways of being in the world, we learn to collaborate towards forms of freedom beyond the wildest changes possible from within our system. From a place of tenderness, we can heal ourselves and our communities from the traumas of Western modernity and empower ourselves to build new systems based on care, reciprocity, and love.

These nets, which we hope you ascend after the ceremony and after you have signed a waiver, and this interactive experience in capitalist decomposition, is really just an attempt to expand that tenderness, to dedicate time and energy to collaborations which free our imaginations from the destructive logics of our systems.

Because while our systems prove time and time again to be incompatible with freedom, our BIPOC and Queer siblings teach us that there can be no common future, no true freedom without Land Back, which means the right of return which means restoring just relations with the earth and all our human and nonhuman relatives.

And to adhere to this truth necessitates an internal revolution, so that we may free ourselves from the systems we have been taught to perpetuate, end the war upon which our peace rests, and follow indigenous world making practices into a just future.

But before we join the mushrooms to bring my silly home back into the circle, to detoxify it, and bring new life to what would otherwise lay in the toxic sludge of a landfill. I want to say a word on struggle. This tender partnership is not intended to relieve us of our responsibilities as settlers to support and fight with our siblings who are putting their lives on the line to protect their homes, peoples, and earth. Rather a practice of Inter species tenderness invites us to jump head first into the fight with love as method.

And in that spirit we want to use this event as an opportunity to weave ourselves into a movement of Secepwemic siblings in the north who are on a different kind of frontlines. The Tiny House warriors are building encampments along the intended route of Trans-Canada Pipeline to block its construction and create safe spaces to live on their unceded lands which the pipeline will cross. They're badass! And they are four winters deep. And we know that movements like this are always vulnerable to the most despicable acts of colonial violence. So we want to use the performance to support their work and hold ourselves accountable to all our relations which will be affected by this pipeline. The gofundme info will be available at the Bar and we encourage you to donate after the Tender Inoculations.

Thank you so much for listening to my speech and joining the ceremony.

We will now demonstrate the pace and energy, mind you pace and energy and not choreography with which we invite you to meet our fungal collaborators and the wood of my home. Following the demonstration we encourage you to join 2 to 3 to more others to take a bag of wood, some mycelium, and find a piece of cardboard upon which to do your own tender inoculations. We will play music and encourage you to talk amongst yourselves, walk between groups, and share a dance with someone. be slow and be tender. And after about 20 minutes we will say some closing remarks, open up the nets, and conclude the ceremony. Thank you

Demonstration:

For the demonstration, two performers ascend the nets and roll around tangling on top of each other. As they begin the movement, I take a bag of shredded wood and pour it onto a preplaced slab of cardboard. I move slowly, to the pace of an audio mix which I made of two songs, Nausicaa of the Valley of the Wind and The Princess Who Loves Insects both from the soundtrack of Nausicaa of the Valley of the Wind by Hayao Miyazaki. As I pour wood onto the cardboard, the two performers begin to release compost mycelium through a hole in the nets onto my head. As the mycelium is falling down on me, I take it in my hands and knead it into the

wood chips.



Ceremony:

Following the demonstration, participants are encouraged to take a bag of mycelium and a bag of wood chips and conduct their own tender inoculations.



Reflections:

At the time of submission, I have only completed one of two performances and I have important reflections. The biggest one is about a lack of transparency with my performers. In the chaos of setting up the space for the first performance and schedule conflicts that made it impossible to rehearse prior to the day of the performance, I never shared my speech with the performers and they heard it for the first time during the performance. The speech which I have included above is the revised version of the speech but performers had some issues with the version that I delivered in the first performance. Given the fact that I had not shared the speech, two performers, one Palestinian and one Lebanese, felt that I had asked them to be performers to use them as props to fit the themes of my speech. In the first speech, I refer to the “slums where I lived in Lebanon” in reference to the Shatila refugee camp. This was also concerning to the performers who did not understand the connection that I was trying to make between my experience in Lebanon and fungi. The result of these concerns is that all three of the performers

from the first performance opted out of the second. This was deeply saddening for me but also a great opportunity to learn and revisit and improve my speech to make sure I was making the link as clear as possible. For the second set of performers, I have been especially conscious of communication and transparency.

Another big reflection is about documentation. Perhaps due to my technological backwardness I have always been hesitant to document projects that I do. However, after a conversation with Cole Heinowitz, I have decided on an interesting way to document the second performance. Throughout the performance, a performer will ask individual participants if to share a one minute thought about the performance, which we will film. The intention of this is to create a dialogue with the audience while simultaneously documenting the performance through the lens of the experience of others.

A final reflection is regarding the demonstration in which I show the participants how to conduct the tender inoculations. In the first performance, I kneaded the compost mycelium into the wood while two performers rolled in the nets while releasing mycelium onto me. During the second performance I will be ascending a rope that runs through the hole in the nets. Two performers will still be in the nets releasing mycelium but two other performers will be on the ground kneading the mycelium into the wood.

It has been an incredibly exciting experience putting on my first performance piece and even more exciting that it grew out of my interest in the work of Sansour.

Conclusion

The one piece of Sansour's model that I did not explore in my writing was the way that spaces of tenderness make us better designers of the world we want to live in. The use of fungi in my performance to compost capitalist waste is an example of this design. However, I want to conclude my senior project with an invitation for others to carve out spaces of tenderness in their daily lives because the internal revolution that they spur opens infinite possibilities from which to empower ourselves as designers of a more equitable and just world.

Bibliography

- Ahmed, Ammany. "Down the Aisle: Ammany Ahmed." Interview by Aimee Brodeur. Feedback NY. Accessed October 11, 2021.
http://www.feedbackny.com/down_the_aisle/amanny-ahmad/.
- . "On the politics of working with food." Interview by Jasmine Lee. The Creative Independent. Last modified September 11, 2018. Accessed October 11, 2021.
<https://thecreativeindependent.com/people/artist-and-chef-amanny-ahmad-on-the-politics-of-working-with-food/>.
- Ahuja, Neel. "Intimate Atmospheres: Queer Theory in a Time of Extinctions." *Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 21, nos. 2-3 (June 2015): 365-85. Accessed April 25, 2022.
<https://doi.org/10.1215/10642684-2843227>.
- Al Haq, comp. *Business and Human Rights in Palestine*. December 7, 2016. Accessed May 4, 2022. <https://www.alhaq.org/publications/8063.html>.
- The Applied Research Institute. "Unholy Communion between the Israeli Settlers and the Israeli Army to Wage War on Palestinian Olive Groves." ARIJ. Last modified October 25, 2021. Accessed May 4, 2022.
<https://www.arij.org/latest/unholy-communion-between-the-israeli-settlers-and-the-israeli-army-to-wage-war-on-palestinian-olive-groves/>.

Arefin, Maymana. "Mapping Alternative Futures through Fungi: The Usefulness of Mycorrhizal Networks as a Metaphor for Mutual Aid." PhD diss., University College London, 2021. Accessed April 25, 2022.

https://www.researchgate.net/publication/359294856_Mapping_Alternative_Futures_through_Fungi_The_Usefulness_of_Mycorrhizal_Networks_as_a_Metaphor_for_Mutual_Aid.

"Art-Life Rituals for Radical Tenderness." ArtsEverywhere. Last modified 2021.

<https://www.artseverywhere.ca/series/radical-tenderness/>.

Arvin, Maile, Eve Tuck, and Angie Morrill. "Decolonizing Feminism: Challenging Connections between Settler Colonialism and Heteropatriarchy." *Feminist Formations* 25, no. 1 (2013): 8-34. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/43860665>.

Burkhart, Brian. *Indigenizing Philosophy through the Land: A Trickster Methodology for Decolonizing Environmental Ethics and Indigenous Futures*. Michigan State University Press, 2019. Accessed October 5, 2021. <https://doi.org/10.14321/j.ctvkjb3xp>.

Crane, Bill. "How Neoliberalism Undermined Palestinian Liberation." *The International Socialist Review*. Last modified September 1, 2021. Accessed November 17, 2021. <https://isreview.org/issue/109/how-neoliberalism-undermined-palestinian-liberation/index.html>.

Dar Jacir. "Home by Vivien Sansour." Dar Yusef Nasri Jacir for Art and Research. Last modified October 16, 2018. Accessed May 4, 2022. <https://darjacir.com/home>.

De la Cadena, Marisol. "Uncommoning Nature." E-Flux. Last modified August 22, 2015. Accessed April 25, 2022. <http://supercommunity.e-flux.com/texts/uncommoning-nature/>.

d'Emilia, Dani, and Daniel B. Chavez. "RADICAL TENDERNESS MANIFESTO." DANI D'EMILIA. Last modified July 2015. Accessed May 4, 2022. [https://danidemilia.com/radical-tenderness/#:~:text=The%20Radical%20Tenderness%20Manifesto%20\(2015,communities%2C%20and%20our%20interpersonal%20relationships%3F](https://danidemilia.com/radical-tenderness/#:~:text=The%20Radical%20Tenderness%20Manifesto%20(2015,communities%2C%20and%20our%20interpersonal%20relationships%3F).

Episode 262, "Dr. PATRICIA KAISHIAN on Queer Mycology." December 1, 2021. In *For the Wild*. Podcast, audio, 1:09:00.

Estes, Nick. *Our History Is the Future: Standing Rock versus the Dakota Access Pipeline, and the Long Tradition of Indigenous Resistance*. London: Verso, 2019.

"Food Sovereignty | Panel Discussion | Palestine Writes 2020." Video, 1:15:27. YouTube. Posted by Palestine Writes, December 2020. Accessed April 6, 2022. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cd48MufilZ0&t=2100s>.

"Fungi: Death Becomes Them." Video. YouTube. Posted by Crash Course, October 22, 2012.

Accessed April 25, 2022. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=m4DUZhnNo4s>.

Gesturing Toward Decolonial Futures, ed. "Co-sensing With Radical Tenderness Deck of Cards."

Decolonial Futures. Accessed April 6, 2022.

<https://decolonialfutures.net/radicaltenderness/>.

Goeman, Mishuana. "Indigenous Interventions and Feminist Methods." In *Sources and Methods in Indigenous Studies*, edited by Chris Andersen and Jean M. O'Brien, 185-94. London: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2017.

———. *Mark My Words: Native Women Mapping Our Nations*. University of Minnesota Press, 2013. Accessed October 6, 2021. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.5749/j.ctt46nq0v>.

HIGGIE, JENNIFER. "Writer and Activist Vivien Sansour on Food, Farming, Heritage and Healing." Frieze. Last modified August 19, 2019. Accessed May 4, 2022.

<https://www.frieze.com/article/writer-and-activist-vivien-sansour-food-farming-heritage-and-healing>.

Ho, Soleil. "How Chef and Artist Amanny Ahmad Is Giving Palestine a Seat at the Table."

Edible Manhattan. Last modified December 5, 2017. Accessed October 11, 2021.

<https://www.ediblemanhattan.com/eat/one-chefs-pop-giving-palestine-seat-table/>.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XoexxUOeZak>. Produced by Al Jazeera. 2018. Youtube.

Jackson, George L. *Blood in My Eye*. Baltimore, Md.: Black Classics Press, 1990.

Kelley, Robin D. G. *Freedom Dreams: The Black Radical Imagination*. 4th ed. Boston, Mass.: Beacon Press, [20]08.

Kimmerer, Robin Wall. *Braiding Sweetgrass*. Minneapolis, MN: Milkweed Editions, 2015.

LaDuke, Winona. *All Our Relations: Native Struggles for Land and Life*. Chicago, IL: Haymarket Books, 2015.

Manna, Jumana. "Where Nature Ends and Settlements Begin." E-Flux. Last modified November 2020. Accessed October 29, 2021.

<https://www.e-flux.com/journal/113/360006/where-nature-ends-and-settlements-begin/>.

Moreton-Robinson, Aileen. "Relationality." In *Sources and Methods in Indigenous Studies*, edited by Chris Andersen and Jean M. O'Brien, 69-77. London: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2017.

"PALESTINE IS GETTING FREE." Interview by Stephen Satterfield. Audio. Allied Media. June 22, 2021. Accessed May 4, 2022. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GiK8oC4CxbQ>.

Pimbert, Michel. "Food Sovereignty and Autonomous Local Systems." *RCC Perspectives*, no. 1 (2015): 37-44. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/26241305>.

Qabaha, Ahmad, Vivian Sansour, Mirna Bamieh, Nasser Jaber, and Leila El Haddad. "Food Sovereignty." Interview. *Food Sovereignty | Panel Discussion | Palestine Writes 2020*. Palestine Writes, 2020.

Rifkin, Mark. "Indigenous is to Queer as..." In *Sources and Methods in Indigenous Studies*, edited by Chris Andersen and Jean M. O'Brien, 205-12. London: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2017.

Rokicka, Gosia. "Decolonizing seeds and the feminine side of things—a conversation with Rowen White." *Permaculture Women*. Accessed May 4, 2022. <https://www.permaculturewomen.com/decolonizing-seeds/>.

"Seed Conservation; Creating New Worlds." Video, 1:49:51. YouTube. Posted by SoA-RPI Events, October 2021. Accessed April 6, 2022. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=o-G6hi5X6W0>.

Service, Tom. "A guide to Iannis Xenakis's music." *The Guardian*. Last modified April 23, 2013. Accessed April 25, 2022. <https://www.theguardian.com/music/tomserviceblog/2013/apr/23/contemporary-music-guide-xenakis>.

Stamets, Paul. *Mycelium Running: How Mushrooms Can Help save the World*. Berkeley: Ten Speed Press, 2005.

Tsing, Anna Lowenhaupt. *The Mushroom at the End of the World: On the Possibility of Life in Capitalist Ruins*. 2015 ed. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2021.

"Vivien Sansour." Interview by Airgo. Sound Cloud. Last modified August 20, 2019. Accessed May 4, 2022. <https://soundcloud.com/airgoradio/ep-202-vivien-sansour>.

Weis, Tony. *The Global Food Economy: The Battle for the Future of Farming*. New York, USA: Zed Books, 2007.

White, Monica M. *Freedom Farmers: Cultural Resistance and Black Freedom Movement*. Chapel Hill, USA: The University of North Carolina Press, 2019.

"Why protecting Indigenous communities can also help save the Earth." The Guardian. Last modified October 12, 2020. Accessed April 25, 2022. <https://www.theguardian.com/climate-academy/2020/oct/12/indigenous-communities-protect-biodiversity-curb-climate-crisis>.

Wilson, Shawn. *Research is Ceremony: Indigenous Research Methods*. Halifax & Winnipeg: Fernwood Publishing, 1996.

Wolfe, Patrick. "Settler Colonialism and the Elimination of the Native." *Journal of Genocide Research* 8, no. 4 (December 21, 2006): 387-409. Accessed October 5, 2021.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/14623520601056240>.