

**[Review] Irus Braverman, *Settling Nature: The Conservation Regime in Palestine-Israel*. University of Minnesota Press, 2023. 362 pp.**

SHANNON WOODCOCK

University of Melbourne

Irus Braverman's *Settling Nature: The Conservation Regime in Palestine-Israel* is a fascinating and valuable contribution to settler colonial studies, environmental and animal studies, history, and genocide studies. *Settling Nature* documents how, since 1948, the Zionist state has dispossessed Palestinian communities through making nature reserves and national parks, and through designating some species as wildlife deserving protection. Braverman is an Israeli born Professor of Law at University at Buffalo, New York, and has widely published in conservation and environmental studies. The case studies in this text provide an accessible and deep understanding of the Israeli state's use of legislation, policing, civil administration and the military to 'war upon' (6) Indigenous peoples via the conservation regime in Zionist occupied Palestine. I come to this text as a genocide studies and Australian history scholar, with a specific interest in how we can speak about biopolitical governance outside the colonial human-animal dichotomy.

*Settling Nature* traces the 'administration of nature conservation on both sides of the Green Line' (1948 Israel), to communicate 'the important understanding that Palestine-Israel is governed by a single settler colonial regime that encompasses Israel's 1948 and 1967 borders,' as 'the early Zionists themselves depicted their project' (viii). The book's six chapters are divided and alternate between those focusing on state control/conservation of land, and those focused on animal species protection. To discuss the land-based chapters first, Chapter 1 introduces the reader to the various state organs, the state's 'nature-policing technologies' that oversee the 25 percent of occupied Palestine's area which is designated nature reserve or national park. This chapter demonstrates the role of the Israel Nature and Parks Authority's paramilitary organisation the Green Patrol against Palestinian, Bedouin and Druze people and communities. Chapter 3 discusses the making-biblical-again Judaization through greening of the largest network of national parks, the Jerusalem park system, which includes the densely populated villages of East Jerusalem and how this relies on Palestinian agrarian labour to attract tourism. Chapter 5 details how Wadi Qana Nature Reserve in the West Bank is used to dispossess residents of the Palestinian village of Deir Istiya of their access to water, which they need to live.

In Chapters 2, 4 and 6 we meet the animals protected by the Zionist occupation, some of the 130 species early Zionists identified as biblical and reintroduced into the landscape of occupied

Palestine. Braverman traces how these ‘wild’ biblical reintroduced species function ‘as proxies of the Zionist settlers,’ whose survival is then construed as dependent on (sometimes extraterritorial) military operations, ‘underscoring the tight “coproduction” of nature and nation’ (4). These chapters also detail how species associated with Palestinians—black goats, camels, olives, hybrid goldfinches, and feral dogs (4)—are closely controlled, and even executed, as threats to ‘nature.’ Chapter 2’s history of how the occupying Zionist state flew ‘biblical Bambi’ (58) (Persian Fallow deer) out of Tehran in 1978 to (re)introduce them to the Jerusalem hills is surprising and memorable. Chapter 4 details the story of the reintroduction of the biblical Asiatic wild ass, and the resultant criminalization of Bedouin owners of camels who drink the water the state now protects as intended for the ass alone. Chapter 6 focuses on the Zionist state’s use of the latest technology to track the protected Griffon vulture beyond Israel’s borders.

Braverman coins numerous terms throughout the book, and ‘settler ecologies’ is a useful way ‘to highlight the interconnection of nature, colonialism, and the state’ (6). Braverman explains how settler ecologies regulate life through state protection of both ‘natural spaces’ and protection of ‘nonhuman bodies’ (6). This model and work brought to my mind Tracey Banivanua Mar’s work on the Queensland colonial creation of national parks in the Bunya Mountains to keep Indigenous peoples out (2010). Braverman shows that settler state claims of protection, including of ‘nature’, are produced from within the political structure of the colony (254).

*Settling Nature* is written with care for the reader’s experience. Braverman narrates international espionage and reflects on the violence of conservation policies, alongside documentation of the anti-Palestinian racism of interlocutors. The ethnographic methodology of the research includes in-depth interviews with 70 Israeli people in senior roles of conservation and nature management. Braverman has known some of these people for 20 years, since her own young adult years of legal work and, earlier, compulsory Israeli military service. Braverman shares observations of the interlocutors with the reader, and I found myself watching for the signs of tension and emotion that make this detailed study of administration and biopolitical governance so powerful. For instance, Braverman respectfully observes the emotional connections of chief veterinarian of the Jerusalem Zoo, Nili Avni-Magen, with the eight Fallow deer she was introducing (‘reintroducing’ in the settler ecology of the Zionist state) to a reserve. Braverman shows us Avni-Magen’s care for the individual deer and tells us that the vet sees her work as a commitment to save the species rather than as action to serve the colonial project to (re)populate Palestine-Israel with biblical species of animals. As the vet’s sentiment is juxtaposed with the fact that 40 percent of individual deer sent into the reserve will die, we are shown the internal inconsistencies of the conservation regime as it functions across many

international contexts, and the fractures within the nevertheless anxiously repetitive structure of settler colonialism that relies on this conservation regime to continue settling nature.

Braverman also reports the statements of Palestinian people, often reflecting on her own inability to understand the nuanced discursive and political context of Palestinian resistance. In the case of Palestinian zoologist Mazin Qumsiyeh, who says that he ‘would never consider asking for help from the Zionist colonizer,’ Braverman’s analysis turns to question her own insistence that they ask the Israeli Biblical Zoo for help (240). Braverman’s recognition of her own limits in understanding Palestinian resistance strategies reassures the reader that Braverman’s text retains the focus of documenting the Israeli state’s settler ecologies without presuming to know what resistance can be, even as she shares some of her relationships with Palestinian people. By sharing Palestinian individuals’ choices in the face of violent occupation enacted through the control of more-than-humans, Braverman creates a text that can be read for resistance strategies while demonstrating authorial refusal to speak for or judge Indigenous resistance.

Braverman rightly describes *Settling Nature*’s contribution to animal studies as one that ‘rather than decentering humans, brings attention to the ways in which colonial dynamics juxtapose between and thus alienate (certain) humans from (certain) nonhumans’ (xiii). Braverman also states that the book contests the binary of human and nonhuman to demonstrate ‘the violence inherent in this juxtaposed way of thinking’ (xiii). The predominant word used to describe animals in the book is ‘nonhuman animals,’ but Braverman twice refers to ‘human animals.’ Neither of these cases is referring to Palestinian people, and in both cases the author uses the terminology as many of us do, to draw attention to the fact that the human-animal dichotomy is a fabricated denial of the fact that we share the animal phylum, itself a Western constructed category. Braverman’s text, written before October 2023, thus aligns with the discipline of animal studies in troubling the human-animal dichotomy, even as the explicit subject of the work is how Zionists have mobilised the categories of human and animal as distinct in order to create Israel through settler-ecologies.

On 11 October 2023, Israeli Defense Minister Yoav Gallant (now the subject of an International Criminal Court arrest warrant for Crimes Against Humanity) stated regarding Palestinian people, ‘We are fighting human animals—and we act accordingly’ (Amnesty International 148). Israel’s mass murder of Palestinian people in Gaza since October 2023 has now been declared genocide by Amnesty International, the International Court of Justice and the Lemkin Institute for Genocide Prevention. In genocide studies, referring to people as animals is recognised as an established precursor to or part of genocide (Savage). Genocide perpetrators ‘dehumanise’ other humans as animals as part of the discursive justification for

and incitement to violence. Witnessing Israel perpetrate genocide (International Court of Justice) and ‘multi-species trauma’ (as anthropologist Neha Vora has written) while I read *Settling Nature* brought me to the question of whether there is another way to speak of and respond to the colonial/Western animal-human dichotomy, a way from which we can refute the right of any human to kill any being. Might there be ways to work from a position outside the ‘juxtaposition’ or dichotomy between humans and animals, and what we call ‘plants’ of ‘Country’ as well, for that matter?

For an example of what refusal to reproduce the animal-human dichotomy when writing about the violence of the colonial structure might look like, I (re)turn to this place where I live, GunaiKurnai Country. As a settler in the relation of being directed by and working with GunaiKurnai Country and Community, I have learnt from Rob Hudson, Gunnai Monero Ngarigo man, that there is no GunaiKurnai word that groups all ‘animals’ under this term (see Hudson and Woodcock 2022). There is no human-animal dichotomy. The first GunaiKurnai, referring to people, were born to Borun (pelican) and Tuk (musk duck). The first GunaiKurnai people were thus raised by Borun and Tuk, alongside the river and the canoe. Communication of the first GunaiKurnai people with their family, therefore, was in the languages of Borun and Tuk, but also in the ‘language’ of the river, the canoe, the riverbank, and specific individual plants of the land and of the lakes. There could be no binary of animals and humans because people were born of Borun and Tuk, there could be no binary of sentient beings as opposed to nature, because GunaiKurnai, Borun and Tuk all lived with the river. Borun, Tuk, the river, and GunaiKurnai people all remain in relation this way, despite the colony.

Turning to the Country I work with to consider how to refer to sentient beings by their names (for me, here, people, Borun, Tuk, the river) while writing about settler colonial structures of violence through ‘animals’ relies on relationships and responsibilities. This learning from the place I occupy enables problematisation of the term ‘human animals’ as reliant on rather than undermining the dichotomy of human-animal used to justify colonialism across places, times and temporalities. Orientation to Indigenous knowledges, including Palestinian knowledges in Palestine, might lead settler scholars to speak from possible other ways of relating to kin. Braverman’s clear mapping of how settler conservation regimes dispossess Palestinian people, Druze people, Bedouin people, camels, olive trees and others in the specific context of the Zionist state of Israel in historic Palestine leads us to new considerations against the human-animal binary.

*Settling Nature* is an outstanding book that documents the central role of nature conservation creation and administration in the expansion of the Israeli settler-colonial state between 1948 and 2022. The depth of Braverman’s ethnographic work is communicated through the writing

of nuanced and dynamic interlocutor reflections and actions and is an excellent model for scholars across disciplines. Braverman's knowledge, relationships and courage are striking in this work. Having conducted and published this research in a settler-colonial context as violent as occupied Palestine is a striking feat. The Zionist state is currently bombing, starving and sniping Palestinian people and animals in Gaza (see Al Jazeera). This genocidal reality highlights the importance of Braverman's documentation of how Zionist colonists use settler ecologies to colonise.

Finally, *Settling Nature* is a valuable contribution to studies of how the Australian settler-colonial occupation has also used and continues to use nature conservation to expand the dispossession of Indigenous peoples. Braverman cites Patrick Wolfe's work on settler colonialism, and brings to mind Tracey Banivanua Mar's work on how Queensland declared national parks to prevent First Nations communities accessing lands marked for colonial recreation. *Settling Nature* is an outstanding and thorough documentation of settler colonialism through settler ecologies that models strong research for international students of conservation, colonialism, anthropology, and biological science.

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Shannon Woodcock is a white historian and genocide studies scholar. They work with GunaiKurnai Community direction on GunaiKurnai Country.