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Inheritance as Violence: Land, Memory and Necropolitics in Damon Galgut's *The Promise*

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Abstract

*In this article the connection between inheritance, land ownership and racial violence in *The Promise* is examined using the theory of Mbembe on the 'crisis of the institution of slavery' and Nixon on 'slow violence'. The study does not consider inheritance as an innocent legal succession of property, but rather as an extension of colonial violence, as Galgut sees it. The fact that the Swart family would own the farm reflects the continued existence of settler privilege in post-apartheid South Africa, and the repeated delay of the Swarts' promised inheritance speaks to the fact that justice is never served when it comes to land. Necropolitics is a concept of Mbembe that helps to account for the possibility of racialized sovereignty to shape who has access to land and who is not included in the political sphere of life. Slow violence is a theory of Nixon which shows that colonialism persists in the form of an act of dispossession that is gradual, normalized and often invisible. This article uses textual analysis to show that *The Promise* is an anti-reconciliation celebration because it reveals the moral flaws of passing down of privilege. Galgut offers a critique not on the notion of continuity but on the idea of inheritance as a tool to perpetuate colonial structures from one generation to the next. In sum, this text posits that real reconciliation will not come until material restitution (and not symbolic recognition) is achieved by undoing inherited systems of inequality. Authored by the authors of the book *The Promise*, this series is a conversation on all of these topics.*

Keywords: Damon galgut, Inheritance, Land, Necropolitics, Slow Violence, Settler Colonialism, *The Promise*, Nixon

1. Introduction

For the last 20 years, South Africa has been and in part continues to be perceived as a South Africa. The TRC's efforts, along with the peaceful transfer of political power, had the potential of creating a democratic constitutional justice, setting a course for the nation to become post-racial. Yet, how people live their daily lives is still dominated by entrenched, deep, and uneven land ownership, economic control, and racial privilege, which continue on as part of the story of national regeneration. The inequalities highlight the fact that although apartheid as an institutional structure ceased to exist, its physical pillars are still very strong (Biko, 2004).

In *The Promise* (2021), Galgut's work provides one of the most intriguing literary accounts of these questions unanswered. The novel is not about reconciliation, rather it is about the failure to live it, as the society it chronicles keeps promising time after time itself to be a society based on reconciliation. The narrative at the heart of the story is actually relatively simple: white woman Swart asks her white husband to make him their black domestic helper (domestic worker) Salome the owner of the little house where she has been residing for many years. While all the Swart family members know that this is what the others want, none of them does it for many years (Galgut, 2021). The pause time that this has imposed has become the novel's major metaphor for the consequences of post apartheid South Africa and brings to light the difference between words and acts as things (Ndebele, 2000).

In the article, I make a case as to what I define as structural violence in *The Promise* and how inheritance is an element of that violence. The act of inheriting is not so much continuity and security as is family tradition; it is a reminder of the colonial relations of power. The Swarts are not only passed on property, but also the benefits and privileges that the racial appropriation accorded them. They have a legacy of landownership, which is rooted in marginalisation, frequently unacknowledged. For this reason inheritance is one way in which colonial power can perpetuate itself from generation to generation "from generation to generation" (Fanon, 1963). In this regard the article uses the theories of Mbembe and Nixon. The idea of necropolitics can be used to explain how the sovereign decides on the political value of living and non-viability of claims of abandonment of others' lives (Mbembe, 2003). The Pretoria Richards Bay Branch of the R.S.S. is highlighted by the fact that despite apartheid's demise, blacks remain marginalized in inherited systems of power in South Africa. For Salome, the situation of political marginalisation was one where the legal ownership was denied time and again (Mamdani, 1996).

It could be argued that the slow violence espoused by Nixon can be incorporated into Mbembe's concept of structural injustice because structural injustice is often slow and imperceptible (Nixon 2011). Slow violence is not a spectacular, public physical violence but rather a violence that comes in over the course of decades and is associated with a multitude of commonplace violence delays, institutional violations and tolerated inequalities. Violence is hardly ever portrayed in dramatic confrontation in *The Promise*. Instead, it's arriving through inaction, deferred action and omission by the Administration. Cumulative effects of dispossession are worsened when house is promised but not transferred in time, but people who are privileged to receive the house have moral immunity (from Harvey, 2003). This article sets Mbembe and Nixon in conversation to show how Galgut makes inheritance itself into a political technology that enables the colonial legacy to persist after the official end of apartheid. The representation of violence in *The Promise* is no longer a matter of yesterday, but continued structuring social relations in the present day South Africa due to access to land, the racial memory and delayed justice (Mbembe, 2001).

The article goes on to work through the notion of inheritance as a colonial institution, and to explore the connection between land ownership and memory. It then examines Salome's personal exclusion of owning property in terms of necropolitics and then Salome's property in the context of slow violence, followed by a reflection on the nature of the exclusion. It then writes its filling about Salome's exclusion from property ownership in the context of necropolitics, Salome's property in the context of slow violence and then launches the syntagma of Salome's exclusion. Finally, the idea of "post-apartheid reconciliation" is questioned by the locating of the "persisting structures" that help to produce settler privilege over time (Bourdieu, 1986).

Statement of the Problem

Although South Africa has moved from apartheid to Democratic Political system, the remnants of apartheid and colonial practices are still present in the country, including inequalities in land ownership, unearthing privilege and enduring race inequality. Although the literature has paid a great deal of attention to themes of reconciliation and memory, and the post-apartheid self as a topic, the concept of

inheritance as a way in which colonial power and social disadvantage persist across generations has received little attention. The inheritance in Galgut's *The Promise* is not just about the transfer of property rights, but of the unspoken history of land, ownership and racial privilege. Its concern is the absence of critical investigations into the practice of inherited property as a form of structural violence and the revealing of the ongoing nature of the colonial past in the present in delayed justice in contemporary South Africa. This research aims to understand how land, memory and power coalesce in an inheritance.

Significance of the Study

This study is significant because it contributes to the understanding of how colonial legacies continue to influence contemporary social and political structures through the concept of inheritance. By examining Galgut's *The Promise*, this research highlights how land ownership, memory, and inherited privilege remain connected to unresolved histories of racial inequality in post-apartheid South Africa. The study expands existing literary discussions by viewing inheritance not only as a personal or familial process but also as a mechanism through which historical power relations are maintained. By applying the concepts of necropolitics and slow violence, this research provides a deeper understanding of how exclusion and injustice operate through gradual and normalized processes. Furthermore, the study contributes to postcolonial literary criticism by demonstrating how literature can reveal hidden forms of structural violence and question the limitations of symbolic reconciliation without material transformation.

Research Objectives

1. To examine how inheritance, land ownership, and racial privilege are represented as forms of continuing colonial structures in Damon Galgut's *The Promise*.
2. To analyze the role of Achille Mbembe's theory of necropolitics in understanding the relationship between power, exclusion, and access to land and social recognition.
3. To explore how Rob Nixon's concept of slow violence explains the gradual and invisible continuation of historical injustice, dispossession, and delayed reconciliation in the post-apartheid context.

Research Questions

1. How does Damon Galgut's *The Promise* represent inheritance and land ownership as mechanisms through which colonial privilege and racial inequalities continue in post-apartheid South Africa?
2. How do Achille Mbembe's theory of necropolitics and Rob Nixon's concept of slow violence help explain the persistence of exclusion, dispossession, and delayed justice in *The Promise*?

2. Literature Review

In postcolonial studies, there is broad examination of a connection between colonialism, land ownership, inheritance, and racial inequality. Since colonial domination does not stop even after its formal end, scholars have claimed that it persists in the form of structures of economy, social institutions, and systems of ownership. The issue of inheritance arises because of both the private nature of or series history of power relation over and a property. For Fanon (1963), colonial systems colonized land as an instrument of power delineating, then, ownership as political power and social citizenship. It can be seen that, through Fanon's analysis of colonial society, the ideologies of colonialism establish a class division between those who are in power and those who are not. It is found that Fanon's portrayal of colonial society reveals a supremacy system, where those who have power are superior to those who do not have power.

In colonial inheritance, scholars of settler colonial studies have expanded upon the concept to assert that the current control of land continues to perpetuate colonialism. Settler colonialism differed from the other forms of colonialism in that it was not merely a political encounter of conquest and occupation, but

it was intentional and permanent in its pursuit to replace and exclude indigenous peoples using a claim to land. Settler colonialism dispossesses the settlers on a system of elimination defined by the deliberate and systematic, or "provened" (Wolfe, 2006), exclusion of the original inhabitants from the ability to own or be politically recognized for access to land. His argument broadens the horizons of colonial violence, by indicating that the process of dispossession is not an event moment but an ongoing episode sustained by institutions and legal systems. Likewise, Edward Said's interpretation of Orientalism helps to comprehend how colonial power not only asserts itself physically on its territory, but also knows it and represents it. According to Said, social designs of colonization establish a hierarchy of knowledge, which categorizes people as lesser beings and legitimizes the colonial government as natural and normal (Said, 1978). While Said's work goes mainly towards cultural representation, his notion might help explain the normalization of historical inequalities via social narratives. Said's focus on discourse, however, raises on a number of questions about material ownership and economic structures that later would be tackled with a discussion of land and dispossession.

Mahmood Mamdani's study has also delved into the intersections of colonialism and political institutions. He believes that, following independence, colonial governments were instrumental in establishing a new order of governability that segregationates the people into political categories and has its repercussions over the long term (Mamdani, 1996). Mamdani also wrote, "colonialism was not in abeyance with the advent of political change because colonial institutions remain to influence citizenship, authority and social relations. His project gives a valuable insight into the existence of historical systems in modern states, but if imbalancing the burden of inherited privilege is an emotional and material impact, he is less interested in that aspect of it.

Another important way of understanding inherited inequalities is to analyze structural violence. The term 'structural violence' was coined by Johan Galtung to refer to indirect disadvantages suffered from within a social system, which are no more active acts of physical violence (Galtung, 1969). Galtung proposes that people can be "violated" when they have reduced opportunities, resources and potential in their society. The idea posits that 'violence' may be insidious, invisible and a condition of the institutions or social arrangements themselves. Yet, Galtung's model has been criticized for the fact that it is 'generic' and therefore, in some cases, it fails to make the links to explanations of the historical background of unequal outcomes resulting from colonialism. In addition to structural violence, the literature has looked at the ways in which historical narratives of colonialism create prevalent, long-term ways of suffering. Political and economic arrangements shape access to health, security, and resources, which may create social inequalities, according to Farmer (2004). He also illustrates showing that violence does not necessarily have to include physical violence; marginalized communities can suffer from normal, expectable systems of violence. Elsewhere, however, Farmer draws his attention to a global context of inequities in health, but his approach provides scope for recognizing other kinds of historical injustice associated with land and ownership.

Another way of thinking about social reproduction is offered by Pierre Bourdieu, its concept that privilege continues across generations. Bourdieu says that social advantages are passed down through what is known as inherited economic, cultural and social capital (Bourdieu, 1986). His theory has shown that, inequalities aren't perpetuated by actions of individuals alone but also by systems of disadvantages passed on from one generation to the next. However, Bourdieu's framework focuses primarily on the reproduction of social class, and thus is not exhaustive on the topic of racialized histories of colonial dispossession. This restriction opens up the possibility to see how inheritance is related to racial power as studied by postcolonial theorists. David Harvey's theory of accumulation by dispossession is a major piece in comprehending the relationship of capitalism and land and historical inequality. Modern economic systems continue to resocialize in the manner of Harvey (2003), who says that there are processes of dispossession, in which basic resources are transferred from the weak to the strong as part of the modern economic system. His idea offers an understanding of how ownership can perpetuate inequality even in the modern democratic society. But Harvey's focus on economics is insufficient to

address some of the salient issues of postcolonial theory, including the psychological and political ramifications of racial exclusion.

Memorability is also an important term in the debate over historical injustice. From the time colonisers left and apartheid ended, scholars say societies have to deal with the legacy of remembering experiences of violence and exclusion. The cultural memory influences how the societies define their pasts and the identity of their present lives, as Assmann says (2011). In turn, questions of responsibility, recognition and justice are foregrounded when it comes to memory. Memory is often cast as symbolic, though, memory studies tend not to look at the relationship between symbolically mediated memory and material inequality.

There have been great works that approached lists of colonialism, dispossession, and inequality, but there is a missing link of inheritance with current manifestations of structural violence. Fanon discusses the psychological impact of colonialism, Wolfe the settler colonial structure, Mamdani colonial political systems and Harvey the economic dispossession. These methods, however, are not sufficient to account for the continuation of inheritance in everyday practices, whether of ownership or of delayed justice. Thus, an interdisciplinary framework which integrates Mbembe's work on necropolitics with Nixon's work on slow violence is fruitful in exploring continued colonial structures. The political exclusion made by racialized systems of power, is "explained" by Necropolitics, as is the institutional lag, lingering, and normalization of racial inequalities over time by Slow violence. Theories are put together to give a better sense of how historical injustice remains after formal political change.

3. Theorizing Colonial Continuities: A Dialogue Between Necropolitics and Slow Violence

3.1 Achille Mbembe's Theory of Necropolitics

Mbembe's theory of necropolitics provides a critical framework for understanding how political power operates through the control of life, death, and social existence. Mbembe introduced the concept in his influential essay *Necropolitics* (2003), where he argues that the ultimate expression of sovereignty is not simply the ability to govern life but the ability to decide "who may live and who must die" (Mbembe, 2003). According to Mbembe, modern power structures do not only regulate populations through laws and institutions; they also create conditions where certain groups are exposed to vulnerability, exclusion, and forms of social death.

Mbembe builds his argument by working with the ideas of Michel Foucault who theorized how modern states control, discipline and regulate populations. Yet, as Foucault's concept is not sufficient to understand contexts where the production of death, abandonment and destruction constitute the centre of political power, Mbembe must assert itself. Whereas Foucault writes about the power to make live and let die, Mbembe is concerned with the power to decide what a "good" life is and whose life can be sacrificed (Mbembe, 2003). One of the main concepts of necropolitics is the concept of necropower, which is the political power that generates the social conditions of "death worlds" where large masses experience extreme vulnerability, exclusion or abandonment. Mbembe suggests that these populations do not need to be killed on the spot, but that they are put under conditions which make their very life an object of control, restriction and devaluation (Mbembe, 2003). It will be argued that this conception of violence opposes the conventional notions of violence as being defined entirely in terms of actual physical destruction, showing that violence may take the form of neglect, exclusion and the denial of rights.

But there is a debate on whether Mbembe's concept is an oversized or an expansionist depiction of the role of death in political systems. The theory of biopolitics put forward by Michel Foucault would maintain that dominant power is not about killing, but more about life management and control in today's world. Institutions like State, School and medical systems function through the structuring of human activity through knowledge and discipline, from a Foucauldian standpoint. However, Mbembe suggests that

regulation of life can't be divorced from exposing certain populations to death in a colonial and postcolonial context. Hence, Mbembe's theory is not an outright rejection of Foucault's argument but a critique and extension of Foucault's argument.

Unelected influence on Mbembe's theory is George Agamben's Bare Life theory where individuals live outside the political realm and become mere biological beings. As Sovereign power establishes exceptions in which some subjects are not protected by the law (Agamben, 1998). Mbembe elaborates this point by focusing on colonial pasts, racial typologies and land control. Agamben's emphasis is on legal exclusion; Mbembe's on the lives that are politically valued or not by colonial and racial systems.

Another link to Mbembe's theory comes from Frantz Fanon's critique of colonial violence. To Fanon, colonial societies are structured by race, placing the colonized individuals in an inferior position and ensuring that they are not given full humanity (Fanon, 1963). However, Mbembe expands on this argument by demonstrating how the conditions of colonial systems engender the political abandonment of certain populations. But while Fanon highlights psychological and cultural impacts of the colonial oppression, Mbembe becomes more direct with his attention to sovereignty and the ways in which life and death is managed. As with all themes in the research area of land and colonial inheritance, necropolitics offers a lens through which to consider the way historical systems of domination are maintained through land and ownership practices. Land accesses, resources, political recognition often were a prerogative of colonial regimes. For Mbembe, exclusion from the ownership of land and home can be seen not only as a difference in income but as a political process which governs the extent to which a person can participate in society. The ones who are not included in ownership may suffer a form of social death, not coping with a sense of security, a sense of recognition, a sense of belonging.

Fellow settler colonization scholars, Patrick Wolfe also theorize that the mechanics of colonial powers do not operate as one-off events but established structures of elimination and dispossession that continue to function (Wolfe, 2006). Wolfe's argument bolsters Mbembe's assertion about the continuation of colonial violence post-coloniality. In the end, however, there are important differences between the approaches of Wolfe to land and elimination, and that of Mbembe to sovereignty and the production of the political vulnerable. In this way, Mbembe's concept of necropolitics can help to create potential frameworks to comprehend the enduring effects of colonial pasts on social and political relations. While some may like to point out that the theory has too much focus on death and disclusion, it importantly demonstrates the operation of power in producing unequal life states. Notably, by combining Mbembe's concept with other theories like those of Nixon, on "slow violence," and of Wolfe, on "settler colonial theory" necropolitics proves fruitful for the analysis of ongoing structures of privilege in modern-day societies through their inheritance.

In this study Mbembe's theory is used to help understand how power is racially distributed and who has access to land, who owns land, and who is socially recognised. It shows that inequalities are not just the result of historical events but a political current process whereby certain groups continue to be excluded. In this way, necropolitics can be used as a theoretical approach to the understanding of inheritance, land and yet to be resolved colonial structures.

3.2 Rob Nixon's Theory of Slow Violence

Nixon's theory of slow violence provides a critical framework for understanding forms of violence that are gradual, invisible, and extended across time. Nixon introduces this concept in his influential book *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor* (2011), where he defines slow violence as a type of violence that occurs gradually and often remains unseen because its consequences emerge over long periods. Unlike immediate forms of violence that produce visible destruction, slow violence operates through delayed consequences, institutional neglect, and prolonged suffering experienced by marginalized communities (Nixon, 2011).

According to Nixon, the traditional notions of violence tend to be narrow since they are mainly associated with sudden occurrences of violent activities like war, physical assaults, and direct conflicts. But for many communities, violence happens in a way that slowly evolves and normalizes itself and happens over a long period of time. They are forms of violence involving environmental destruction, economic exploitation, displacement and social exclusion; their victims are rarely able to impose their suffering on Masses (Nixon, 2011). His theory invites scholars to pay as much attention to events of destruction as to those processes that lead to vulnerability in the long run.

The key innovation of Nixon's theory is to extend the scope of violence to non-lethal physical injury. He believes that the most insidious violence is the lack of action, the delay and that the institutions do not deliver justice. Some groups are consistently denied a resource, recognition or protection and suffer some harm which might be described as indirect, but is nonetheless devastating across the generations (Nixon, 2011). This is related to the concept of structural violence among others of Johan Galtung who describes structural violence as violence inflicted not directly by individuals or groups, but rather by social structures (Galtung, 1969). Galtung's idea, however, is a valuable insight into institutionalized inequality and Nixon builds on this by highlighting the dimension of time. Galtung has greater emphasis on the fact that social systems set up salient inequalities, while Nixon discusses the ways in which these inequalities persist slowly and are not obvious to those outside of them. The theory which Nixon proposed thus adds a temporal dimension to the understanding of violence as it shows how history is present in slow processes instead of singular acts of violence (Galtung, 1969).

This notion of Nixon's is especially important for postcolonial studies as manifested in what colonial systems do can have a lasting effect at times following the official eradication of colonial power. The control of land, resources, and their use of communities often creates conditions of inequality that are passed from one generation to the next. According to Fanon, the deep social and psychological divisions among humans that result from colonialism can be attributed to the racial hierarchy set up by colonialism between the colonizers and colonized people (Fanon, 1963). While Fanon focuses on the psychological and political consequences of colonial rule today, Nixon makes reference to the ways these issues affect people in more subtle, invisible ways. Settler colonial theory is been used to explore the relationship between slow violence and colonial dispossession as well. Settler colonialism is not-as Patrick Wolfe variously puts it-a thing that passed or a structure that passed or a now-surviving reality established by killing native claims to land and belonging (Wolfe 2006). Wolfe's argument aligns with Nixon's belief that violence can persist outside of actual armed fighting due to the existence of colonial systems through institutions, ownership, and social patterns. Wolfe, however, is more interested in the land and its elimination, while Nixon is more interested in having a broader understanding on how harm evolves slowly as time goes on.

Land ownership is particularly relevant since dispossession practices often take place over a long period of time as opposed to one-off and forceful concessions. The idea of 'accumulation by dispossession' describes how the economy has been and will continue to transfer resources from those at the fringe to those favoured by certain groups, via practices such as privatisation and unequal ownership, between individuals and groups (Harvey, 2003). Harvey's argument reinforces Nixon's theory in its attention to the way dispossession can be propagated in institutional and economic ways. But it is capitalism that is emphasized in Harvey, and experience of being long misled, long invisible that is emphasized in Nixon.

Memory also is important to the concept of slow violence. Injustices in the past are rarely awarded because the impact of these may not be experienced by an individual event. Collective memory is central to understanding of historical events and social ties to and with the past (Assmann, 2011). Nixon's theory is relevant to this talk in that his argument indicates that types of suffering that are not acknowledged or erased continue, for lack of immediate visibility. To learn more about how Nixon's theory of slow violence manifests in inequality, this study offers a new conceptualization of inequality as something that can happen over a longer time, through acts of omission and negation and through the gradual normalization

of an absence. Nixon elucidates the mechanisms by which populations remain excluded while Mbembe elucidates the mechanisms by which populations have been excluded. These theories collectively prove that violence does not have to be physically manifested; it can also be manifested in other forms such as the issue of the rights, resources and recognition for a prolonged period (Nixon, 2011).

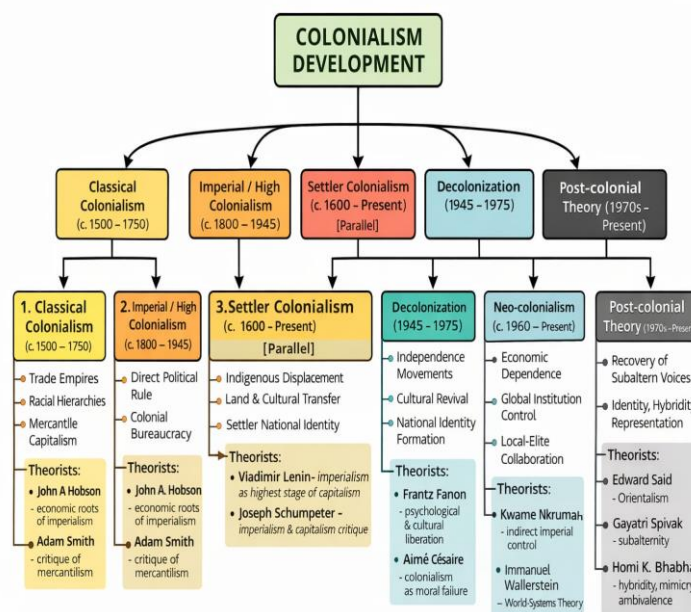


Figure 3.1 : A developmental cycle of settler colonialism

4. Discussion and Analysis

4.1 Land, Inheritance, and the Material Continuity of Settler Power

The Promise brings up the issue of land as a material possession and the sites where histories and questions of relationship and continuity at its core. In this section, the novel's depiction of a stable, unchanging farm in the face of time, politics, and generations will be analyzed. The analysis addresses the way the relationship between land and the inheritance is built up, as presented in the distribution of ownership to the members of the Swart family, as well as their failure to live up to *The Promise* to Salome. In these moments the novel brings to the surface the ongoing nature of property in systems of power and exclusion.

Initially, the reader is introduced to the Swart family farm as a place that has been around for centuries and is still in the hands of the same family. The farm seems like a microcosm of the changes that are happening around it: as the cast of characters of the family changes, as there are disputes and deaths, the farm itself, with its consistent routine, just keeps going. This idea is introduced by the narrator, who underscores its permanency, and how the farm remains in the same place over the years, belonging to the same people, the same family, generation after generation: "The farm is still there, of course. It doesn't go anywhere. It sits in the same place, year after year, owned by the same people, the same family, generation after generation" (Galgut, 2021, p. 5). The farm thus is not a neutral space, as it is represented, but rather a space signifying inherited authority. This continuity may be taken up from the study of Achille Mbembe concerning the necropolitics, the ability to access security from systems of power, resources and social recognition (Mbembe, 2003). The farm's ownership gives each of the members of the Swart family stability, identity and authority while Salome's relationship to the same land is uncertain even after being with it for her entire life. The difference between permanent ownership of

the family and the exclusion of Salome illustrates the workings of power in terms of control over material resources. The land is not just about wealth; it is about belonging and you and I do not all belong equally.

When the farm becomes a part of the Swart family's identity, then inherited ownership becomes more apparent. Meanwhile, after Rachel's death, the matter of *The Promise* that was made to Salome is still unresolved as the family still perceive the land belonging to their line. Galgut has the following quotation, explaining how family identity relates to the feeling of ownership: "It's always been ours, this place. Our father's, and his father's before him. That's how it works. That's how it's always worked" (Galgut, 2021, p. 72). For the family, the question of how and how it is possible for the family to own is not their concern; they think of ownership as merely a continuation of families. At the same time, using Mbembe's definition, this moment is illustrative of the ability of power to sustain itself, to draw lines of who has legitimate access to the resources and who does not. Labour and long permanence on the farm do not secure Salome the same recognition as the Swart family do as they come as mother, sister, daughter and grand-daughter to the farm. She has been on the farm for a long time but still has to rely on the will of those that own the farm. It is therefore clear from the quotation how the act of inheritance can be a way of creating and sustenance privilege.

The novel also examines the interplay between land and time in considering the farm as an "afterlife. In the entire story line, family member deaths, fallen relationships, and changes in political situations all remain unchanged, but the systems of ownership remain in place. This dichotomy between the imperishability of matter and the mortality of people was depicted and expressed by the narrator here: "People die, families break apart, but the land stays where it is, silent and patient, waiting for the next owner" (Galgut, 2021, p. 146). This depiction resonates with Rob Nixon's notion of 'slow violence: violence that is not sudden but prolonged, waiting to happen and unaverted; a violence that presses in upon us without warning, as if it has always been there, only to end all too suddenly' (Nixon, 2011). This type of violence continues to be evident in the perpetuation of unequal land relations illustrated in the novel. The injustice of Salome's ownership isn't built overnight by a single face-to-face encounter, but over the course of years of delays, evasions and acceptances. As silence remains, the land continues to bear witness to a historic building that is still alive due to the passage of time, which have made inequality a norm.

But the restriction on restitution is manifested again in that the family decides to only move Salome's house and not to deal with the bigger issue of land. Even if these promises are starting to be realized, justice is not fully realized. This constraint is quite evident in the novel, which states: "It's only the house, after all. Just that small piece. The rest of the farm stays as it is" (Galgut, 2021, p. 201). This moment is slow violence as Nixon envisioned it because the injustice is carried on and perpetuated through solutions and partial solutions—not by outright refusal. The recent passage that moved the house is just one example of how a justice that arrives after many years of neglect can be without its transformative energy. It's not just that Salome had to wait, it's that the unequal structure around the farm got stronger. Nixon's theory is useful in understanding how historical violence is perpetuated by normal behaviours, which may seem not unreasonable, but in effect maintain the status quo.

This is when the ownership of the farm is passed on and expressed with its strongest form, namely a continuing tradition of passing the farm down from one generation to the next. Land ownership is depicted when it passes from hand to hand, from father to son, to the next generation, and everybody views it as something natural and normal: "The farm passes on, from one hand to the next, like a story that nobody questions. One owner replaces another, and the fields lie under the same sky, waiting for the next generation to claim them" (Galgut, 2021, p. 176). By comparing inheritance to "a story that nobody questions", the element of ownership places itself as a re-telling narrative that when repeated, it is accepted as a story. The land is passed down to each generation along with the expectations for land ownership. The transfer of the farm comes across as the natural thing to do, following a precedent that is difficult to see as a reflection of history based on inequalities. In the last representation, Mbembe's and Nixon's theories are combined. As seen from Mbembe's perspective, inherited control of land is a system

in which access to resources and security is dependent upon structures of power. Nixon's point is that despite the effect of the Equal Justice Standard, whose 1974 rules were ratified by Congress three years later, injustice can endure silently over the years. The violence is not just one act but an evolving process sustained by making it normal, waiting and passing it on.

As such, the depiction of land in *The Promise* shows an inheritance practice is not only a private family matter, but a system through which historical power remains. Not only property, but a system of privilege is passed on to the next generation by the Swart family. The novel exposes how the fascination and quest for land ownership perpetuates exclusion and historical injustice, through Mbembe's 'necropolitics' and Nixon's 'slow violence'.

4.2 Necropolitics and the Exclusion of Black Subjects from Land Ownership

The representation of Salome's relationship with land and property is explored in the following section in relation to *The Promise*. It is centred on the novel's depiction of exclusion and the denial of ownership, but also the denial of voice, as well as the denial of belonging. The chosen moments exemplify how Salome exists physically in the space of the farm whilst being socially, politically and economically separated from its privileges of ownership. These moments allow for the analysis of how power works in accessing land, recognition and participation.

Salome's appearance on the Swart farm is a contradiction throughout the novel. While she's lived and worked on the land for many years she has not taken ownership of it. The small house in the lot where she lives, belongs to the lot, but it never feels like one of her lots. There is a stress that Salome is not in the structures defining ownership, which are merely the legal frameworks, rather than within the limits of the property: "She lives there, in that little house, the one at the back. It belongs to the farm, like everything else. Like the trees, like the cattle, like the land itself" (Galgut, 2021, p. 33).) can be seen as indicating this position. The representation can be explained in terms of Achille Mbembe's concept of necropolitics, which regards power structures as managing whose lives are recognised and whose are left outside of recognition and vulnerability. Achille Mbembe has described and explained this representation as an examination of necessity and death politics, namely, power politics determining whose lives are recognized as having value while others' lives remain exposed to necessity, death, expulsion and vulnerability (Mbembe, 2003). Salome's position illustrates that the exclusion can happen both through physical deportation and lack of rights and recognition. She can stay on the farm, but can't have the authority and security that comes with owning it. She can only be tolerated within boundaries set up by those with power. Here, Mbembe's theory can be useful to uncover the dominant thesis which posits that there is not only no ownership of the legal nature, but also a lack of distribution of being. The rights to access the land of the Swart family rest on them, but not on Salome, because she does not own the land (she only works there) and because the family has lived there for a long time. The quotation thus demonstrates the circumstance of someone might live in a place without being its proprietor. The farm becomes a place of power – who has privilege, who is hindered? The farm becomes a place of power – who has "privileges", who is hindered?

This is especially evident as the family talks about *The Promise* made to Salome, while excluding her from the dialogue. With the death of Rachel, the next unit in the family sell-out comes under discussion for the family members of the Swarts. Though Salome's future is promised, she is still on the sidelines. The emotional and political distance is conveyed in the following description: "They talk about it in the kitchen, in low voices, as if she isn't there. *The Promise*, the house, the land. Words that move around the room without ever reaching her, as if she were made of air" (Galgut, 2021, p. 95). The moment here is significant as Mbembe understands the power of exclusion through the denial of participation and recognition, known as "necropolitical power." Salome is not physically off the farm but put "outside" of the structures where "key decisions" are taken. Since she has been cut from the project, it shows how the powerful ones

have a voice and the others are there. That they talk about her future without her participation speaks of a form of "political immarginalisation" with her being an object of discourse rather than a subject.

The theme of exclusion is also reflected in the Swart family's sense of ownership and belonging in the novel. There is a resistance when it is talked about handing over the house to Salome as it feels natural to the family. "Why should we give it away?" Their debate asks displays the ways in which ownership dovetails into notions of character and entitlement: "Why should we give it away? It's ours, after all. We've lived here, we've worked here, we've paid for everything. It's not as if she's family. She's just been here, that's all" (Galgut, 2021, p. 148). In the Mbembe's frame this moment represents the nature of boundaries between recognized and unrecognized subjects enacted by power. Ownership becomes a tool to distinguish and thus legitimate who is connected with land. Inheritance is proof of belonging for the Swart family and it has not been enough for Salome due to lack of legal, social authority. Necropolitics provides an insight into how mechanisms of power produce an environment in which groups are denied access to power resources that affect security and identity.

The point of noter and lack of Salome's voice is further emphasized when the story tells of making life-choices without taking her into account. She knows what all of this has to be done, she is the one who will be affected by it the most, but rarely is she in charge of it. In the novel: "Nobody asks her what she thinks, or what she wants. She's part of the place, like the walls, like the floors" (Galgut, 2021, p. 121). This representation seems to correlate well with Mbembe's perception that power is what is the basis of recognizing subjects in political and social systems. The exclusion effected by Salome's position is an example of how a person can be excluded through invisibility. She occupies place, but cannot be in charge of decisions regarding place. She is only partially recognised as human due to the way of ownership whereby she is beneath those with property.

The last form of exclusion comes in terms of institutional mechanisms that surround ownership and legal recognition. The system seems more approachable for those in power in the eyes property and official concerns. The novel depicts this disparity with institutions: "The offices are designed for people like them: "The offices are built for people like them, with desks and forms and polite voices that explain the rules. For others, the doors remain closed or too heavy to push open" (Galgut, 2021, p. 139). This moment also expands on Mbembe's view on necropolitics by highlighting the systems in which power works, defining access to rights and recognition. Exclusion of Salome is kept alive, not only through decisions made on an individual basis, but also on an institutional one. The inability to easily access legal recognition reinforces her marginal position and shows how political structures can continue patterns of exclusion.

Therefore, the representation of Salome's exclusion from land ownership in *The Promise* demonstrates how power functions through invisibility, denial, and restricted access. Through Mbembe's theory of necropolitics, these moments reveal that exclusion is not only about physical possession of land but also about determining who has the authority to belong, speak, and claim rights. Salome's experience shows how ownership structures create divisions between those who inherit security and those who remain dependent upon the decisions of others. The novel presents land as a space where political power and human recognition become deeply connected.

4.3 Slow Violence, Delay, and the Normalization of Historical Injustice

This section discusses the role of delay and postponement in *The Promise* as important narrative tools. It examines the influence of the perceived and unfulfilled promises, the administrative rules and procedures, and repeated delays on the lives of the various characters in the novel. In these moments, the analysis aims to show how injustice can manifest itself not by overt violence, but rather by insidious, gradual processes that are embraced by both consciousness and custom over time.

The vow taken by Swart with Salome is a moral pledge which, for much of the novel, is never fulfilled. The prospect seems easy, but it's hard to find that it will come about when the Swart family keeps putting it off. Once Rachel dies, the task of passing on the house becomes something the family knows they must do, but aren't really willing to do. *The Promise* is an indication of a duty, but it is deferred over time, gradually becoming just another empty formality: "It was only a promise, after all, and promises are made every day, and broken every day too" (Galgut, 2021, p. 28). As Nixon describes, this moment is part of what he calls the study of "slow violence" that describes how "off-visible" harm over time may take the form of a long term or a delayed incident none the less, perceivable as sudden and dramatic (2011). It's not a single instance of direct violence towards Salome, it's a failure to live up to *The Promise*. However, the harm takes years to come about due to delay, hesitation and inaction. Nixon's theory contributes to understanding the subtle means by which injustice can endure just because it has become normalised in society and doesn't shock. When it is always broken, waiting, which results from the breaking of *The Promises*, becomes an experience of suffering.

When the Swart family starts to consider the idea of selling the property, delay becomes more apparent. The family members don't accept Salome's assertion at face value; instead, they focus on hurdles and hassles that will have to be overcome to settle the claim. Ownership becomes enveloped in procedures which inhibit immediate action. In this context, the argument presented by the novel is: "You can't just give away land like that. There are procedures. There are laws. It's not so simple" (Galgut, 2021, p. 115). The moment illustrates the capacity of violence to manifest itself verbally on a bureaucratic level instead of face-to-face, as set forth by Nixon's theory. Often time spent in institutions occurs slowly, when they have routine procedures that perpetuate dangerous situations, or when their administrative delays allow the harm to happen. Legal processes are not just an issue in and of themselves the issue is the fact that these legal processes can be tools to perpetuate historical injustice. Exclusion still goes on because injustice can only be barely perceived as the system moves slowly enough.

When the family puts into perspective the practical challenges of honouring *The Promise*, the bureaucratism of delay is in even clearer light. Both paperwork and official approval is needed as well as interaction with authorities for the transfer of the house. But it is these your conditions that keep Salome from the resolution she's been hoping for. This is the predicament that is described in the novel: "It isn't so simple, they say. There are forms to fill in, offices to visit, officials to convince. Nothing can be done quickly, not in a matter like this. These things take time" (Galgut, 2021, p. 112). as a gradual process. The years-of-waiting for recognition and ownership are part of the violence that Salome suffers. Every "delay" has repercussions: the longer it takes for a decision, the longer she cannot leave the house. Slow violence is hard to see because it occurs over time, and this case is a perfect example of how injustice can occur in the ordinary administration of things (Nixon, 2011).

The repetition of delay is also manifested in the repeated family discussions after moments of loss and remembrance. Funerals and family reunions in the novel resurface as foci for the unfulfilled expectancy. But even as the problem continues to be recognized it becomes neglected: "Another funeral, another gathering, and the same old talk comes back. *The Promise*, the house, the question of what must be done. But nothing changes" (Galgut, 2021, p. 132). From Nixon's point of view, it's slow violence and Nixon's violence. Nixon's slow violence, slow violence. The injustice does not go away just because people recognize that it's there. Rather, through the ongoing delay the unequal situation perpetuates itself as part of everyday living. The redemptive reopening of *The Promise* is a good example of the ways in which historical injustices can live on through talk that never reaches resolution.

The ramifications of this delayed justice are most apparent at the end of the novel, when *The Promise* is met. Over the years, however, the meaning of the act has changed, due to the long interval of waiting: "So many years, so many chances, and now at last it happens. A small piece of land, a small house, handed over at the very end" (Galgut, 2021, p. 241). The question isn't just whether the house will be handed down, it's when. Justice comes too late, and thereby is restricted because inequality has been inculcated

into generations of experience. A point that Nixon's theory illustrated is that the harming is gradual and, as a result, is powerful, because it can happen over time and reverse differently.

Thus, when considering *The Promise* and the portrayal of delay in the novel, the reader learns that injustice can be expressed in ways that are not plainly obvious and express the force of bare arms. The novel showcases the persistence of historical inequalities through the brokenness of promises, administrative delays, multiple conversations, and delayed/future action. From a theory of Slow Violence, formulated by Rob Nixon, it is clear that time, delay, and institutionalization normalise injustice. Iden's experiences around the house that was promised to Salome, let me say these episodes are themselves acts of violence, a form of waiting which becomes violent.

4.4 Delayed Justice and the Failure of Post-Apartheid Reconciliation

This section focuses on the impact of delays in justice, and considers whether symbolic forms of restitution can provide any remedy for past injustice. It aims at the yawning space between awareness of sin and sustainable progress in transformation. The analysis, through the moments of the book *The Promise*, focuses on how after a considerable length of time an obligation's fulfilment may diminish in meaning from what it was originally. The section also considers the possibility of ongoing unresolved structural processes after structured events of reconciliation have taken place.

The pledge to Salome is finally spoken at the end of the novel, it fulfills at the end of 20 could be 30 years later, after waiting and waiting, and after social transformations, a sense of uncertainty and the argument of the changes themselves. The transfer of the house, for a refurbished 'justice' of sorts comes at a time when its significance has shifted with time. *The Promise* is no longer tied to the ordinance based on a moral resolution, but instead it is joined with an admonition of years of neglect and delayed action: "*The Promise* is being kept, yes, but it no longer carries the weight it once did" (Galgut, 2021, p. 238). This moment signifies Rob Nixon's idea of 'slow violence' because the violence that surrounded Salome's erasure was not an act of violence that could be easily seen. Slow violence, according to Nixon, is violence that occurs over a long period of time and has a delayed effect, usually not the kind that is obvious at the time of the incident but rather the suffering that takes place afterwards (Nixon, 2011). But injustice was not just that *The Promise* was kept delayed, in the novel the repeated delays permitted injustice to become a part of the norm. By then, the delay effects may have had lasting consequences which is what justice has been delayed for.

When the official events of a real estate conveyance are done, the restrictions imposed on reconciliation make themselves more conspicuous. Paperwork is finished and one feels as though there has been justice. Galgut describes this moment: "The papers are signed, the officials satisfied, and the matter is closed. Yet the farm looks the same as it always has, the same fences, the same fields" (Galgut, 2021, p. 244). It could be seen as evidence of slow violence, as formal solutions can elide the longer-term impact of historical injustice. Slow violence may persist because the institution is more interested with what's visible in its results than the long term structures that cause inequality. The official transfer of the house represents a moment of legal settlement in *The Promise*, but not of an overarching shift in the relationship of land, ownership, and privilege.

The novel also highlights the harmful consequences of waiting too long to reconcile as it depicts situations where many who had a part to play in the original promise are not there when the final act of reconciliation comes. An interval of time intervenes between the beginning and the end of a commitment: "Those who first heard *The Promise* are gone now... The words remain, but the people who spoke and heard them have disappeared" (Galgut, 2021, p. 246). This is certainly a typical case of Nixon's conception of slow violence; there's a gap between the initial wrong and its more distant repercussions. As time goes on, it will be harder to find who has the responsibility as the people involved may not be there anymore.

A delayed justice doesn't take away the injustice; it places it in the past, and then it persists once all the persons have died.

There is also a questioning that takes place in this novel of whether social change will invariably come after a transformation in the political sphere. Despite the changing political landscape South Africa has seen the farm continues as essentially unchanged: "The country has changed its face, they say. New leaders, new flags, new songs on the radio. But here on the farm the fences stand where they've always stood" (Galgut, 2021, p. 144). The Nixon theory is that the unchanging farm is a sign of slow violence: inequalities will prevail despite political advances. However, the violence is not visible at the moment, as society seems changed but essentially not much. To show how structural injustice can exist despite the shift to a rhetoric of change and reconciliation, the quotation follows. The quotation illustrates this: structural injustice can survive even if the public narrative is of change and reconciliation.

Lastly, the novel highlights the continuity of ownership throughout restitution: "The farm remains the same, the structures of ownership endure, and the broader system that enabled the injustice continues to function" (Galgut, 2021, p. 245). This moment can be treated both as a moment of Nixon's theory and Mbembe's theory. Nixon's perspective reveals the vitality of structures of inequality which "layer" over time and institutional continuity. For Mbembe, the persistence of ownership arrangements reflects the legacy of power as a way of controlling access to resources and insecurity social recognition. There is not much change in the distribution of power, even in the formal presence of justice.

4. Conclusion

This study concludes that *The Promise* is Galgut's critique of inheritance and land ownership as mechanisms through which the colonial privilege survives in post-apartheid South Africa. The analysis argues that the Swart family's historical relationship to land is not just about the personal transfer of land but is an extension of practices of racial inequality. The farm is a sign of unequal property rights, a place where the privileges of one generation are handed over to the next, while other groups for instance, Salome are left out of the fold of recognition and belonging. Moreover, if Mbembe's theory of necropolitics and Nixon's understanding of slow violence do indeed illuminate these processes, the works of both marginalization and dispossession are still in play; both in the political system and through the slow yet inevitable mechanisms of forgetting. Particularly, both Mbembe's theory and Nixon's conception have the ability to define how injustice could be ritualized through social non-recognition, as well as access to resources and ownership, over time. The novel finally confronts the belief that there will be a symbolic reconciliation to solve the historical inequality. *The Promise* attempts to tell the story of promises and promised justice, where delayed restitution and ownership long standingness suggest a long wait is necessary to do some justice – to do more than just make promises of reconciliation.

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