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The slow violence of Israeli settler-colonialism and the political ecology of ethnic cleansing in the West Bank

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ABSTRACT

This paper uses the concept of 'Slow Violence' in a Palestinian village to explore the political ecology of the Israeli settlers-colonial paradigm. Slow Violence is violence that manifests gradually and often invisibly, in contrast to spectacular violence that more frequently garners media and political attention. My research explores and maps out the structure of slow violence in Palestine, where the politics of the curtailed Palestinian National Authority and the Israeli settler-colonial enterprise converge. It addresses a significant scholarly gap as attention to these issues focuses almost exclusively on violence as a spectacle, overlooking the centrality of nature as a productive political and developmental space in settler-colonial discourse and practice. Here I focus on three aspects of the slow violence of settler colonialism and its relationship to political ecology: the unleashing of wild boars into Palestinian villages and the decimation of seasonal agriculture, the dumping of sewage waste of Israeli settlements onto Palestinian villages, and the curtailment of indigenous centered modes of production and mobility. These practices transform the meanings of security and stability for Palestinians. They have served to weaponize landscapes against Palestinian inhabitants.

KEYWORDS

Israeli settler colonialism; political ecology; salfit; wild boars; slow violence

An image of Iskaka from an elevated vantage point, depicting part of the built-up area of the village. ©Saad Amira, Iskaka 2019

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Introduction

The summer of 1996 would go unnoticed in Skaka, a small village lying at the heart of the West Bank. Farmers were getting ready to harvest the wheat they had planted in winter and considering the produce allocation. Some would go for consumption, some into storage, and a mere fraction sold or bartered. That is how villagers sustained their families. Abu Shehab's family had designated four donums for wheat cultivation due to the centrality of this food commodity to their food basket. However, an unexpected occurrence changed the course and nature of their subsistence for years to come. Days before the harvest, they were astonished to find that all the wheat kernels were scattered on the ground. Upon further investigating the matter and conversing with their neighbors, they found that an animal was behind the incident. Specifically, it was a wild boar, an animal that increased exponentially in a volatile space characterized by encroaching Israeli settlements.

The village communities of Salfit subsequently experienced declining wheat production. In the last few years, this tradition has almost become extinct along with other agricultural activities that have been devastated by the Slow Violence of the wild boar. The story of this village and others constituting more than sixty percent of the area of the West Bank relates only the symptoms of an omnipresent settler-colonial violence, one that perpetuates incrementally at a time when 'anti-colonial' Palestinian developmental rhetoric is at its peak. I argue that a full grasp of the settler-colonial complex involves viewing the (none) presence of the Palestinian Authority (PA) in rural space along with the Slow Violence of settler colonialism in Palestine. The tensions, continuities, and interruptions between the PA and the Israeli settler-colonial state interact in a highly volatile space. Grasping these interactions is crucial in understanding the dynamics of such hybrid structure. Additionally, I argue that the structural politics of the PA and Slow Violence go hand in hand in rendering Palestinian rural space a barren wilderness, thus facilitating the expansion of settlements in the West Bank and the ethnic cleansing of Palestinians. Slow violence effects new notions of security and development for Palestinian villagers and accelerates their transformation into enslaved consumers to Israel by afflicting their ecological modes of production. Against this backdrop, invoking receding memories, confined bodies, altered intimacies, and distorted leisure as sites of spatial contestation contribute to understanding the complex processes that perpetuate Settler-colonial realities in Palestine. By including indigenous experiences and voices as knowledge of historical value, we will open histories and geographies of settler colonialism to indigenous interpretations, beyond statistics, nationalistic discourse, World Bank jargon, and International law.

Violence at the threshold of environment, politics, and oral history

I draw on multi-sited ethnographic research (participant observation and key informant interviewing) and semi-structured interviews around oral histories of Salfit governorate villages to gather indigenous knowledge about how environmental violence has manifested over time. I use a mixed-method approach, and I have been snowballing my sample. I spent time in the villages of Salfit conducting interviews and informal conversations with long-term Palestinian residents between 2017-2019. I also draw on these semi-

structured interviews to better understand the constricted presence of the PA in rural spaces. Drawing on scholarship in development studies, indigenous and settler-colonial studies, urban studies and political ecology, I argue that detaching ecology from the contours of the violent enterprise of settler colonialism would leave us with a curtailed view of the long-term development of Israeli settler-colonialism.

The settler population in the West Bank has doubled since 1993, reaching more than 500,000 settlers. Moreover, wild boars, sewage of Israeli settlements, new modes of consumerism in Palestinian villages are all intertwined elements shaping a complex settler-colonial structure. This paper aims at exploring the interplay between these elements and their agency in shaping new modes of security/insecurity for the Palestinian villagers of Salfit. Moreover, situating slow violence in its own Palestinian 'developmental' context becomes crucial for making clear the PA's contribution to the sustainability of the settler-colonial system. A good deal of research has elaborated on 'development' under occupation focusing on international donors and organizations (Haddad 2017[1], Nakhleh 2011[2], Khan 2004[3]). However, only a handful of accounts have viewed development from the angle of everyday lived experiences. For capturing a longitudinal view of violent political-ecologies, ethnographic research and oral histories on vanishing landscapes become essential methodological techniques for producing indigenous knowledge on how environmental violence has evolved. While the Israeli state has been building and expanding its settlements territorially in the Occupied Palestinian Territories, this expansion was effected by a set of non-territorial means, including: curtailing mobility, devastating agricultural development and turning Palestinian landscapes space into a weaponized wilderness. Finally, this paper demonstrates the conditions under which an animal species, a non-human actor, such as the wild boar, have proliferated and invaded the Palestinian rural space.

Ecologies of settler colonialism: a historical outlook

The slow violence I outline here has several different historical and theoretical frames. The most obvious is the modern history of Palestine/Israel. The Zionist movement developed in Europe as a 'national revival movement' in response to growing prosecution against European Jewry in the late 1880s century. As a result, It sought to establish a national home by colonizing Ottoman Palestine. This was formally initiated with the Balfour Declaration of 1917, which promised Jews a national home in Palestine. It took the Zionist movement 30 years under British rule and support to establish the State of Israel on the ruins of more than 400 Palestinian villages, which were ethnically cleansed of hundreds of thousands of Palestinians. Palestinians commemorate the years between 1947–1949 as the 'Nakba'(catastrophe), where the Zionist movement colonized part of Palestine.[4] Egypt and Jordan annexed the remaining part of Palestine up until 1967 when Israel invaded and occupied the rest of Palestine. Three years before the 1967 occupation, the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) was established as a new revolutionary elite, representing Palestinian organizations, which organized commando units and raged attacks on Israel from Jordan, then from Lebanon, up until 1982, when the Israeli army invaded Lebanon and Palestinian organizations were forced to leave. Tunisia became their main base.[5] In 1993, PLO and Israel exchanged recognition. A Palestinian limited rule in West-Bank and

Gaza ensued, under a 'Palestinian Authority' (PA), which has been engrained in nepotism, clientilism, corruption, and security collaboration with the Israeli state.[6]

Less obvious is the settler colonial history of North America which had important ecological dimensions. In North America, settler colonialism has waged a bio-ecological war against indigenous communities, exploiting a variety of weapons for the sake of their annihilation. Of these, disease was the most important. Epidemics sickened and killed vast numbers of Indigenous Americans. But the introduction of some animals and the extirpation of others mattered too. For example, in the Western Plains in the nineteenth century, the US Army spearheaded the organized destruction of the bison. Such policies resulted in the loss of indigenous food sources and dramatically damaged Indigenous communities.[7] Eventually, there was a drastic drop in the indigenous population.[8]

That precedent is relevant because it points us to the structural workings of settler societies. Patrick Wolfe underscores the logic of 'elimination' of natives by settlers, where elimination is not only a matter of physically exterminating the native - a onetime mass murder – but more importantly, references the process of establishing a new community on confiscated land. As Wolfe puts it: 'Invasion is a structure and not an event.'[9] As such, as Griffiths points out, settler invasion includes novel environmental practices and alien life forms in the settlement economy.[10] The very process of farming and improving land, here, is a settler colonial process, uprooting 'natives' and transplanting settlers, their crops and their animals – a slow violence hidden in the language of civilization and improvement. Wolfe cites the former mayor of Jerusalem, himself a settler, announcing that '*As a member of a pioneering youth movement, I myself 'made the desert bloom' by uprooting the ancient olive trees of al-Bassa to clear the ground for a banana grove, as required by the 'planned farming' principles of my kibbutz, Rosh Haniqra.*' [11]

Lorenzo Veracini's theoretical exploration of settler colonialism is also useful in thinking about ecological imperialism. Veracini places transfer at the heart of his work, exploring various transfer techniques where land is the central site of such activity. Transfer and elimination of the native go hand in hand. The encroachment of settlers' agriculture on indigenous flora and fauna and the reproduction of indigenous modes of production transfers away an indigenous form of life and tries to obliterate it.[12] However, the most important explorations of the interface between settler colonialism and ecology for my purposes come from North America. Alfred Crosby's pathbreaking work underscored the centrality of ecology in the overall workings of imperialism, thus extricating ecology from the peripheries of empire. Crosby gave agency to domesticated animals, pathogens, pests, and weeds brought by settlers and presented them as passive and distractive colonizers.[13] William Cronon's 'Changes in the Land: Indians, Colonists, and the Ecology of New England' is also crucial to understanding a phenomenon at the intersection between politics, ecology, and 'development.' Cronon suggests that a better understanding of the processes of Indian replacement (perhaps ongoing Palestinian replacement as well) should be rooted in the discipline of environmental history. A discipline as such posits ecosystems as dynamic entities of variable interactivity with different cultures, lifestyles. Accordingly, the introduction of pigs to North American ecology, and its ensuing encroachment on indigenous production space and cycles, should be read as inextricable from shifting notions of property and production. Cronon also argued that the ethnic cleansing of Native Americans and the obliteration of their indigenous ecological scenery went hand in hand with deforming their cultural lifestyles (subsistence, food,

leisure, and memories) over extended periods. Additionally, Cronon provides critical insights into studying the agency and intertwinement of human/non-human forces in political projects; therefore, he connects seemingly disparate forces – wild boars, consumerism, settlers, new property relations, in one overarching spatial network of power. [14]

Mobility is also central to understanding this spatial network of power in the Palestinian context and other Settler-Colonial contexts. Peteet and Tawil-Souri convey the multiple Israeli encroachments on Palestinian everyday mobility: checkpoints, annexation wall, soldiers, barbed wires, and settlements, among others. Such impositions effect constricted notions of time and space for Palestinians and even shape their identities.[15] In the Palestinian context, especially in rural space, diminishing mobility is intertwined with receding lifestyles, centered on land and seasonal production. Contextualizing mobility here entails narrating stories beyond an encounter on a checkpoint or a barbed wire and more towards following the nexus between colonialism, consumerism, environmental violence, and changing notions of intimacy, leisure, and insecurity over time, and how these elements slowly shape the mobility/immobility of Palestinians in their village space. Peteet has done some of this work. I expand that process here by turning attention to the neglected story of the intersection of villagers' mobility in Salfit with the encroachment of wild boar.

Processes of 'Slow violence' in Palestinian rural space

While much has been written on settler colonialism's inherent tendency to conquer land and eliminate native societies, few accounts have tackled settler-driven ecological transformations as key elements in uprooting natives in Palestine. I do this by invoking Rob Nixon's 'Slow Violence' – a concept coined to politicize the playing out of seemingly neutral projects in an arena of unequal power relations. Nixon looks at pollution, the clearing of forests by international corporations, excavating mineral resources, and the aftermath of chemical wars as ongoing violent projects, which continue to prevail in many forms and incrementally afflict marginalized communities. Nixon describes Slow Violence as a phenomenon that is not limited in terms of space and time, extending beyond the spectacle of direct violence. If direct violence is an act of high visibility, limited in terms of time and space, slow violence is an invisible violent imposition in the making, attritional but exponential in its consequences, incrementally unfolding over time. Nixon stipulates that what makes slow violence unique is the fact that it is rarely perceived as violence at all since it lacks the spectacle of direct violence. It thus requires both a different set of discourses, measurements, and representational interventions to understand its contours, consequences, and challenges. [16]

Time in this incremental buildup of violence is not a clear-cut event or an epoch with a clear beginning and ending that wreaks havoc on bodies and environments in a localized bounded manner. 'Slow violence' also directs attention to the fact that violence can be an incremental process, which gradually permeates through dynamic spaces such as bodies, ecosystems, and natural resources. Slow violence is a debilitating mechanism that eventually deforms the spatial characteristics that made a place livable.This process yields 'displacement without moving' as it leaves people stranded in disposable ecosystems, which once have thrived. People stay in their places deprived of the ability to lead on previous life styles.[17]

In terms of causation and agency, slow violence and structural violence share some common grounds as both frameworks move our attention away from events to structures. They explore imperceptible systems, hidden agency, social injustice and manifestations of violence with no clear object-subject relationship.[18] Galtung underscores the static, silent, stable nature of structural violence in the production of inequality and asymmetric life chances.[19] In doing so, structural violence draws attention to invisible power relations, hence tends to focus on questions of agency.

Davies suggests that Slow Violence and Structural Violence are irrevocably linked. He argues that tackling Slow Violence without heeding structural and political forces in place weakens the concept of slow violence. Davies rejects Nixon's often cited statement that slow violence occurs 'out of sight' by asking: to whom is it 'out of sight'? Davies's ethnographic work in Free Town, a place overwhelmed by toxic pollution nicknamed 'cancer alley' in southern Louisiana, underscores how afflicted communities notice slow violence through 'Slow Observations': slow violence is seldom out of sight to the communities it affects.[20] However, these observations do not make headlines due to the workings of 'epistemic violence', which marginalize stories of disposable citizens. [21] In a place engulfed by petrochemical assemblages, Daisy, an old resident of Free Town whose grandfather was a freedman, observed the slow accumulation of toxic pollution, invoking stories of elevated cancer rates, invasive chemical smells, and the withering of vegetation in her garden. The slow withering of hearts, lungs, bloodlines, and ecosystems in Free Town does not resemble instantaneous forced displacement in similar petrochemical industries worldwide.

In Free Town, historically marginalized people (95% African American) have been displaced (and killed) by a process spanning decades. Structures of racism, economic inequality, discrimination, and environmental degradation converge, creating optimal conditions for slow violence to perpetuate itself smoothly.[22] In Palestine, Sophia Stamatopoulou has introduced the cognate concept of 'Waste Siege' in exploring landfills, streams of sewage, rotten bread hanging on trash containers, and other nauseous phenomena in a couple of sites in the WestBank. She argues that waste siege is a similarly visible form of 'slow violence', characterized by its inescapability, its omnipresence, its diffusion beyond its point of generation, imperceptibly wreaking havoc on bodies.'[23-] Drawing on these studies, and my own ethnographic work below, I argue with Davis that slow violence – as violence in progress- is usually perceptible by afflicted communities through 'slow observations,' in my case, people's daily rant about the wild boar's epidemic. In in the villages of Salfit, their survival strategies, their critiques of PA's developmental policies as impotent in tackling a wild animal, let alone a settler, all in all, are reflections of a growing awareness of an ongoing deformation of their everyday lives. If Slow violence is 'out of sight' or apolitical to outside observers, it is obvious to the particular locality or village society.

This paper also draws on Nixon ethnographic style. What is enlightening about his protagonists is their direct, bodily, everyday engagement with slow violence. These intimate encounters invoke alternative narratives and alternative heroes, enlarging the sphere of action and solidarity among a large stratum of marginalized people in different settings. This genre emphasizes the great value of oral history; life history; and subaltern history in empowering oppressed people (migrants, displaced, ethnically cleansed and stateless people) in taking part in knowledge production and representation. Rendering the

stories and lived realities of the Palestinian subaltern is crucial for politicizing their stories beyond objectifying knowledge of Palestinian elites and Israeli colonizers who occupy land, bodies, and meanings. This is integral to extricating the 'rural' from the silencing claws of the frontier. Despite the dire consequences of direct violence perpetrated by settler colonialism in Palestine, I argue that slow violence is essential to the Zionist enterprise. Slow violence hinders Palestinians' organic attachment to land and mutilates the memories and aesthetics of Palestinian villages, rendering its inhabitants 'disposable citizens.' [24]

Slow Violence is particularly useful for exploring the hybrid nexus of different actors, bodies, policies, and ecosystems. In this article, the key actor is wild boars which, in the villages of Salfit, as in the German democratic Republic in the 1970s, are "creatures of development'[25], a plague caused by the convergence of state policies, ethos, plans, and ideology.[26] Fleischman rightly suggests that the study of non-human actors, their agency and materiality, can indicate how our human world has incrementally transferred/impinged upon other worlds.

People living in the Salfit district, well understand that overlay, it is clear in their complaints about the proliferation of wild boars and how they have limited the villagers' mobility, spread fear, destroyed agriculture, inflicted damage on the ecosystem of village space, and eventually dismembered villagers in situ. These complaints, narratives, anxieties, cynicism, and fear shadow everyday life in Iskaka, making visible the workings of structures of settler colonialism and the slow environmental violence it engenders. Moreover, Villagers in Salfit district are cognizant of the political/structural dynamics of such epidemic. However, beyond village space, their stories are not worthy of making headlines. They are depoliticized and subordinated to more explosive encounters. In a place where Settler colonial aggressions and Palestinian resistance play out in an assymetric arena of direct violent encounters, aerial bombardment, and apartheid, the wild boar phenomenon is relegated to a 'natural ' phenomenon of secondary importance.

Environmental violence and deforming Palestinian villages

A farmer from Yasouf, underscores a novel dimension to the receding agriculture, to do with the aesthetics of the Palestinian village, its provision of non-commercialized leisure. In his village, one communal grove(Janayen Yasouf) had traditionally provided that lesiure space. Janayen Yasouf used to be a lovely expanse of a vegetated communal space with a running spring of fresh water. With the encroachment of the wild boar it was devastated. Yasouf's community rehabilitated and fenced it in 2005 to keep boars away and encourage people to come and grow their own seasonal veggies, in a scenery full of citrus scents and shades.However, the fencing and protective measures were sabotaged numerous times by unknown perpetrators. In a village where scores of settlers invade every once and while, sabotaging and drawing graffiti on the wall with 'death to Arabs', it seems likely that settlers were the perpetrators. Once the gates of the 'Janayen' were destroyed, wild boars roamed freely and destroyed everything. This man recalls that women of Yasouf village used to stay till late in the 'Janayen' to guard the garden. He even remembers a time when the Israeli army imposed a night curfew on his village as he was sleeping with some friends in the Janayen without any fear. Jnayen Yasouf were incrementally transformed to an arid space of dry lemon trees in the last 15 years due to wild boars

destruction. Janayen Yasouf is one drop in a sea of Palestinian gardens turned to wilderness by the proliferation of wild boars in Salfit district.

Despite initiatives on the village level to counter the influx of boars, none proved useful. Freedom of movement was restricted around the village due to wild boars attacks where the narrator himself sustained an injury. '*I was hit by the fangs of a wild boar, which pierced my stomach. I nearly succumbed to that blow and was staggering and screaming, until my relatives came and helped me to escape*' Accordingly, the shrinking mobility of villagers, and the way they resist/acquiesce to Slow Violence, are all non-territorial markers showing that the village as a frontier in progress.[27]

As I was conducting oral history interviews in Salfit governorate, I often heard people complaining about the havoc wreaked by wild boars on their agriculture, especially over the last ten years. People talk about how they were dependent on wheat for their everyday consumption all year long. However, wheat cultivation, along with that of many other crops, had been destroyed by wild boars in a very short time. What is shocking is the tranquility surrounding these people's dispossession. Many interviewees concur that the PA did not express any sense of emergency or interest in tackling this epidemic. According to a testimony given by a teacher living in Skaka village in Salfit governorate, the number of wild boars has grown exponentially in his village and in its surrounding environment. Over the last fifteen years, this abnormal phenomenon has had disastrous effects on seasonal agriculture and the planting of seedlings. He claims the influx is deliberate: he and some of his neighbors have observed Israeli trucks unload tens of these boars onto his village. When asked about remedies for such an affliction, he complained about the inertia of PA's institutions in combating the epidemic and the involvement of settler colonialism in such a matter. *'People are forced not to cultivate their lands, even their house gardens. I am one of them. Every night, Wild boars encroach upon my house and feed on dry ripen almonds and make noises as if human beings are peeling them. I collect stones on the roof of my house, and after midnight, I throw them at the invading wild boars*.'[28]An old hunter recalled his youthful wanderings in the mountains of Salfit where he used to come across wolves, hyenas, wild cats, and other wildlife. He had never seen a wild boar before. '*I've come across different types of wild animals as I used to camp and roam around at night in Salfit district without any fear, however, I haven't ever seen or come across wild boars*'[29]

An employee of Salfit's municipality affirms the previous claims and underscores the passivity of the PA in dealing with such an infestation. Drawing his correlation between the wild boar epidemic and settler colonialism, he associates the incremental devastation of agriculture with the development of settler colonialism in this region during the late 1970s onwards:'*The wild boar epidemic is connected to a number of ecological elements that have afflicted our subsistence economy. This affliction includes the dumping of settlers' sewage onto Palestinian land, settlement roads that cut through villages, the confiscation of lands for military purposes, in addition to a set of laws, and regulations that legitimize the confiscation of uncultivated land like the Ottoman land law of 1858 . The intertwinment between these different impositions altered one relation with land*.'[30]

Two sisters and long-term residences of Iskaka concur that the seasonal nature of many of these agricultural activities has been devastated by this combination of factors. They indicated that they used to rely on summer and winter seasonal agriculture for their subsistence, which included planting wheat, barley, corn, tomatoes, lettuce, chickpeas, beans,

and much other produce. Wheat, as they explained, was an essential product. Since their childhood, their family used to grow wheat and use its annual yield for consumption throughout the year and storage for the following year, and on some few occasions, they traded their surplus for money or other produce.

This tradition continued uninterrupted till the abnormal encroachment of the wild boar in the late 1990s, which have been destroying and desecrating their produce and have put an end to a long-lived tradition. In the last ten years, they nearly quit seasonal agriculture and became dependent on markets to buy different staples. One of the outcomes of the infestation is curtailed mobility. This generation of Palestinian peasant women are more home bound because of their gradual disengagement from agriculture, an unfeasible economy once deemed existential for Palestinian peasants. The sisters explained that this transition to domesticity is full of intimate emotions of loss, shame, and weakness. ' *It's true. We are old, but still, we have the energy and would like to pursue these seasonal agricultural activities because of their nutritional advantages and economic value*'. Walking, foraging and hiking and was the way by which these women covered a mountainous radius of 3-5 km, sometimes even longer as (KJ) and (L) reflect . Most of these women walked in groups of three or five, and in some instances, they would be accompanied by male companions or children. With the high number of wild boars in the last 10–15 years, their mobility has been crippled.[31]

A woman in her mid 50's, from Deir Istya village, invested her dowry (an integral capital for her family) in buying her and her family's only land plot. However, it had to be left unattended when she sustained an almost lethal attack by a wild boar. Consequently, that plot of land transformed into a dense 'forest' full of wild plants and stray animals. Once supplying the poor household with subsistence and leisure, now it has become 'useless' and 'a bad investment '.[32] In investigating this case, I visited that area with her retired husband. Upon descending 20 meters further from that neglected plot, we were astonished to observe a pack of wild dogs, around 15, wandering around and encroaching upon the area, creating fear and anxiety in our hearts. This curtailment of mobility is best captured by the experience of one active couple in agriculture in Skaka village. They emphasized the loss of mobility in the village's economic sphere and indicated that, if provided with a safe cultivated space, they would spare no effort in developing and making full use of their space. [33]

Many interviewees, especially women, recall a time when they used to wander around their village looking for edible wild plants. In the last 10–15 years, Israeli settlements impinged upon that space and incrementally succeeded in destroying that lifestyle.

Women peasants (Fellahat) were the dynamo of the Palestinian family. One of the most crucial roles played by them was the maintenance of social relations within rural communities, and despite being seemingly subordinated in a patriarchal system, this shouldn't undermine the integral roles played by them. Fleischmann emphasizes that by suggesting a more nuanced notion of power which should give particular emphasis to the unique ways women position themselves against colonial and imperial powers in rural societies that is different .[34] Narrating these subaltern perspectives to critically deconstruct settler colonialism in a particular place entails politicizing the everyday life of the subaltern, thus giving the weak some weapons to express their narratives and inform their complex realities. While domestic work and agriculture were a burden on women's back, the latter gave them leeway and mobility to engage economically and politically in the village

space and beyond. I propose that their mobility delineated the fluid/free boundaries of the village space. Women's mobility in this rural setting enabled them to be catalysts in agriculture, cultural life, armed struggle, and domestic life.

Al Sawiyah village, lying on the road connecting Ramallah to Nablus, has always been known for its 'Sahel'; an excellent plain of land cultivated all year long. This 'Sahel' was the food basket for Al Sawiyah until the introduction of the wild boar in large numbers 15 years ago. A farmer from Al Swiyah underscores that the boars brought insecurity that wrecked their subsistence economy, freedom of movement, and their culinary traditions of eating delicious figs and grapes. He reached out, along with other farmers, to the ministry of agriculture for support to enclose the land with a metal fence. They did nothing. '*We received nothing from them, and as we pay them taxes, it is their responsibility to kill wild boars and dispose of their filthy corpses*'" .[35]This annihilation of agriculture, particularly wheat, has accelerated Palestinian villagers' transformation from producers to consumers. Before 2007, villagers of Farkha used to grow red wheat, which they could mix with white wheat bought from the market. However, nowadays, growing red wheat '*is never heard of*.' All the wheat is bought from the market, and many people have become dependent on buying bread from bakeries. As an active Palestinian farmer in al Matweh area pointed out, [36] '*It is very costly for a Palestinian to transform from a producer to a consumer under occupation*.' (RB) has been trying to plant seeds, but it is only a matter of time till the boars feed on them. He thinks that fencing the land for protection is an efficient way for combating boars, but since that is very costly it is out of reach. He anticipates that he will eventually quit cultivating his land In light of a '*dormant Palestinian Authority*'. (RB) is one of a handful of farmers cultivating in al Matweh area, designated as Area C, cushioned between Salfit, Farkha, Bruqin, and Ariel settlement. His village used to yield 20 tons of wheat, planted in an open area within the environs of the village. These outlying spaces have become a burden to maintain under the blows of wild boars and the encroachment of settlements.[37]The confinement of Al Zawiyah village presents a blatant exemplar of the interplay between settlments' expansion, space control, and environmental violence. The Israeli state controls the ins and outs of Al Zawiyah. It controls the checkpoints and the boundaries of the annexation wall annexing confiscated land from the village . '*How come we have all these wild boars while we are confined in this reserve? Settlers and soldiers torch our trees, but due to our confinement we are not able to do anything*' *(AH) from al Zawiyah exclaims!* [38] These lived experiences of slow violence inform the way village space is visualized beyond territorial markers. The contraction of farming,the cutailment of women's mobility, turned the village into a village center. In such a hostile geography, village expanse is gradually dissociated from village life and in the process of becoming a scenery of despicable value.

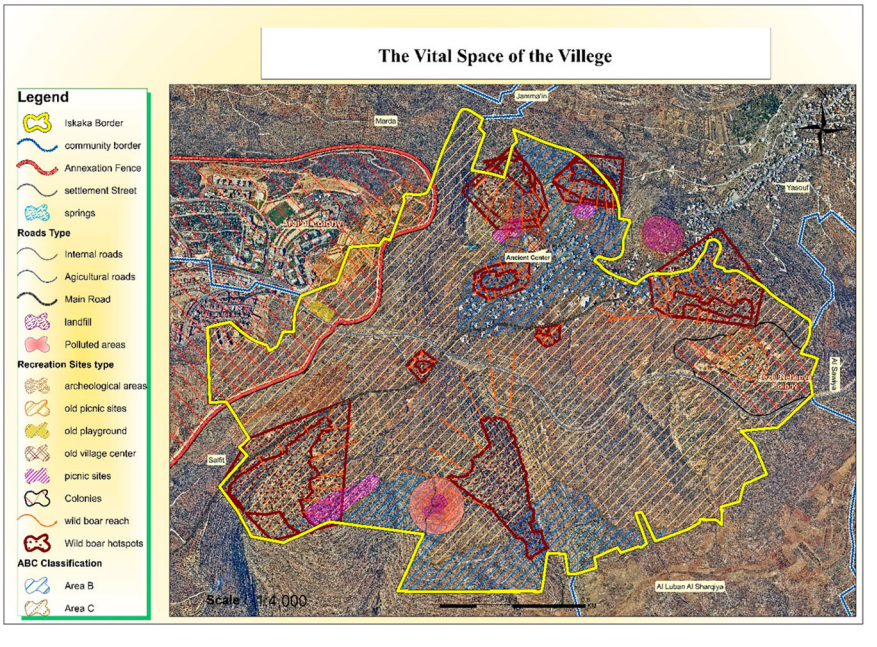
(RB) thinks that many of his acquaintances have quit agriculture to work in Israeli settlements built on their land. Lately, his agricultural work sustained heavy casualties. Once he reached out to the Ministry of Agriculture, they document the damage and make a pledge to support once they had funding . (RB) concludes that agriculture in such a context '*is like gambling*'. Hence working in Israeli settlements is much more stable in terms of income. He thinks that the budget of the Ministry of Agriculture (1-2% of the total budget) is inadequate. Thus he urges the Palestinian government to re-channel funds directed to the inflated 'security sector' (around 30% of the annual budget) to agriculture. He claimed that, ' *If I, as a farmer, find someone who supports my work in agriculture, I can*

support my family, and I will persist. But If I am unable to persist, I will leave agriculture and work in a settlement. Millions of dollars are wasted by the PA in useless investments, on trivial things'(ملايين بتنكب في الأرض على الفاضي). He pointed out that the PA channels one-third of the annual Palestinian budget to the security sector. At the same time, it has no presence in al Matweh-designated as area C, constituting more than 60% of the territorial base of the token 'State of Palestine'. (RB) contends that while PA's discourse is premised upon a rhetoric of statehood, their shameful non-presence in Area C and their neglect of agricultural development are key factors in the abandonment of farming.[39] In the Palestinian context, settlers can easily seize untended land, especially with minimal to non-existent support from the PA. Additionally, This seizure is also performed through affecting indigenous leisre space, as leisure used to be an outdoor activity, unbound by time, space, and gender. But now it's increasingly becoming part of the settlers' hiking cultures. On visual, political and social terrains, the specter of wilderness – wild bushes expansion onto deserted/inaccessible land – can be viewed as a precursor to an Israeli chain fence confining grabbed/deformed land. The wild boar here becomes a final phase/symptom/technique in confiscating Palestinian land by transforming productive land into waste land.

A group of Palestinian women from Iskaka village enjoying their time in Al Matweh in the early 1980s
© Abed, Al Matweh early 1980s

*Al Matweh permeated by a stream of Sewage running from Ariel settlement and Salfit city. ©Saad Amira, Al Matweh 2017

The wild boar as an animalized technology



*An aerial map depicting indigenous space as experienced by villagers of Iskaka.

A farmer from Yasouf describes the irregular nature of wild boar attacks as if they are a paramilitary organization. Scores of boars terrorize people at night, a pattern that he described as being even more unpredictable than the Israeli army. He argues that the

irregularity and the arbitrary behavior of this animal make it particualry dangerous.[40] Even kids walking home in Salfit were frightened of boar attacks. Zeid emphasized the terror inflicted on householders by boars: once the boars embark on eating around a house, they make gross noises, destroy 'Sanasil' (land terraces) and spare nothing – even the trunks of old trees are scratched and destroyed. [41]

Many interviewees drew an analogy between wild boars and settlers in terms of destruction, encroachment, and disturbance. They did so not in the spirit of animalizing the settler or humanizing the boar. At one level, they emphasized their shared destructive effects. At another, they underscored the intertwinment of human and non human actors in settler-colonial projects.

In and around Marda village, the story of the wild boars' proliferation is intertwined with the development of the enormous settlement complex of Ariel colonizing Marda's land. Once military bulldozers built the Ariel settlement on confiscated land, denying people access to it, wild boars operated like '*mini bulldozers*' on the remaining land, mainly house gardens. As noted, people in the village claim that Israeli trucks unleashed scores of wild boars and stray dogs onto Marda [42] Many environmental institutions in Palestine, including 'Ma'an Development Center' and 'Areej research Institute' have documented countless stories of settlers or soldiers releasing wild boars into Palestinian villages, especially in Slafit, as it's the most engulfed Palestinian governorate by Settlements. They also document the damage they caused and are exploring ways in which to control this epidemic. Saad Dagher, an agricultural engineer and environmental specialist living and cultivating in the village of Mazari'a Nubani on the fringes of Salfit affirmed that wild boars have been destroying agriculture and reduced land boundaries as terraces and paths eroded. These processes happen over an extended period, making people increasingly unable to recognize their plots. Land becomes untended exacerbating wild-boars proliferation. [43]

In this respect, the wild boar could be viewed as a mini bulldozer in animal form, an animalized technology. What makes it an efficient agent of settler colonialism is its flexibility, spontaneity, and its ability to operate/uproot on many different scales and landscapes, including that of the household, the plot, and the village. The Israeli state confiscates large tracts of land and effects changes on that macro level, the boar effects macro level change through micro level action. It takes land garden by garden. This slow erasure mechanism plagued the nexus between production, leisure, and food production and contributed to new facts on the ground. Many tracks leading to many plots of land have vanished, leaving no trace to the recent past and transforming some of the outlying landscape of Iskaka and other villages into a wilderness.

The villagers argue that wild boars were unleashed in herds onto their villages by settlers and soldiers in the last 15 years. This claim doesn't entail a complete genealogy of the wild boar phenomenon and its early evolution phases, however, it is suffice to highlight the engagement of the 'Israeli Natural Reserves Authoirty' and the 'Israeli Society for the protection of Nature' in reintroducing animal species as both institutions were engaged in developing strategies for preserving wild boars and procreating them.

The Israeli Society for the Protection of Nature was headed by Avraham Yoffe, a military commander who had no training nor knowledge of environmental issues. Yoffe was charged with recreating a 'primal'; boundless wilderness. The first slogan of a nature preservation campaign during Yoffe's reign was: 'Don't Pick, Don't Uproot, Don't Sell, and

Don't Buy', however it was eventually changed.[44] The intertwining of environmental work with the settler-colonial military world signals that environmental restoration was bound up with pacification. It also underscores the volatility of nature as a contested territory, a frontier to be pacified by the enforcement of an imaginary biblical geography.

Weapons of the weak in tackling wild boars:

People of Salfit have pursued many strategies to counter the epidemic of wild boars. However, the slow encroaching nature of this epidemic has weaponized the political ecology of Salfit against its Palestinian inhabitants. With limited means at hand, farmers at the village level could not repel this devastating political ecology. It has devastated the economy, leisure spaces, and memories. This crystalized at a time when the PA have been engaged in a process coined as 'building state institutions', especially after 2004. It is integral to situate this institutional discourse within the lived realities of a colonized people to unmask the role of building and development in producing a securitized space shredded by walls, armies, and wild boars.

People in Skaka Village reached out to their village council to help with the boars. They supplied them with a potent pesticide of great effectiveness. It was the first and last time they would be supplied such poison. He adds *'The last time I searched for it, I was told by the village council that Israel is prohibiting this poisonous material from circulation in Palestinian markets. Another pesticide was marketed but it was of very weak efficiency in killing wildboars '* [45] Marda's village council was hesitant in distributing poisons to the farmers so as not to get into trouble with Israeli authorities, as one farmer told me.[46] Conversely, Yasouf village was quite proactive. The PA did nothing at all to combat wild boars. *'We collected money from people – 5000 nis-(around $1500) and we bought poison and killed lots of them. PA should provide poisons. Even when these animals are killed, you need a caterpillar to pile them up and burn them. The disgusting smell remains for years*'.[47] The fact that the poison is quite expensive could be quite straining for many farmers. However, not being able to purchase the poison at all because it is out of stock for political reasons is a devastating situation.[48] Nowadays, many farmers concur that an ineffective poison is available in the market with very weak efficiency. Another man from Iskaka thinks that it is of utmost importance for the PA to train people in combating wild boars as '*we should take matters in our hands as the PA is unable to operate in our village where the largest part of it is designated as area C*' .[49] One year ago, Salfit municipality received some excellent news that the PA, would send a police force to kill the boars. However, it seems that the long-awaited force was poorly trained and thus, it lost the battle against the boars, DA satires.[50]

Simultaneous processes of colonization and urbanization

The slow colonization of Salfit district (by people and by pigs) effected forced urbanization in the region, tansforming landscapes, lives, and life styles into volatile infrastructures (dumpsters) of some sort. The Matweh is one of these landscapes turned into an arbitrary open air sewage infrastructure, harboring Ariel's sewage and Salfit's.Upon Oslo accords, Israel transported populated city centers to the PA (Area A) – like Salfit, without giving them control over the natural expanse of those areas where treatment

facilities and other developmental projects could be established. Israel handed over the PA a population without waste management possibilities due to the impossibility of development under such a circumstance. Once Salfit became a governorate in the year 2000, the municipality embarked on infrastructural development. They decided to install a modern sewage system but could not install a treatment system. The result was the digging of a four kilometer-tunnel and the disposal of that sewage water in the Matweh area. They followed Ariel settlement's strategy. It has been disposing of their sewage in the Matweh for more than 15 years. The sewage collects in the Matweh and passes down to Bruqin and Kafr AL Dik villages. People there have expressed their exasperation to the PA but no avail. The PA has recently extended the tunnel and carried the sewage down to Wadi Al Bruni; a lovely scenery that has now become engulfed by sewage. Sewage clogs the tunnel, and every once in a while there is a spillage of dirt. An active urban planner in Salfit interviewed and chatted with relevant PA officials and illuminated PA's awareness of this grave dilemma. However, their alibi for their shy response was that they were incapable of doing anything because the Oslo Agreement meant their hands were tied and their occupation in more important outstanding political issues. '*As an urban planner, I am unable to envision proper planning for my city*', *the urban planner expressed discontent about envisioning an urban future for his city*.[51] This urban planner thinks that the Israeli state has been encouraging this devastating form of urban crawl to pave the way for the planned expansion of its settlements in this region.

The Matweh once a popular tourist destination, has lost its value through a combination of boars and sewage. Cases of Leishmaniasis and amebiasis have soared in Salfit. Insects, mice and rats proliferated as well. In winter, settlement sewage and stray dogs are unleashed onto the village. The sewage infiltrates the underground water and contaminates it. The western quarter of Marda has been afflicted by sewage to a point where they called in the Palestinian civil protection agency to intervene. 'Thankfully, we didn't drown in Israeli sewage' (MA) ridicules.[52] Mosquitos of high toxicity increased, resulting in an unprecedented level of bites and diseases. (SA)'s relative got bitten by a mosquito while she was pregnant. She suffered immensely due to the breakout of an unknown rash and was on the verge of having a miscarriage. Before transforming the Matweh into a dirty pond, it used to be a lovely scenic place connecting different villages. It used to have a pure running stream and people enjoyed its water; '*it was like heaven with a waterfall. As kids we used to enjoy ourselves and spend a good deal of time playing around, exploring, and picking edible wild plants '.* As for the Bruni wadi, where the Matweh's stream enters, it used to be a water source for domesticated animals. (SA) recounts that when he and his siblings were young, they were asked to get some bright white pebbles from the basin of the Bruni to be used in traditional baking stoves. He elaborates: 'We used to conduct 'Sarhat'; long promenades, forgetting about time and picking what that valley has to offer in different seasons. Once the valley become contaminated and the landscape deformed, my village donned that valley a new name: WADI AL MAJARY; THE VALLEY OF SEWAGE', (SA) elaborates with an exasperated tone reflecting dismay, sadness, and a sense of irreversible damage. [53]

Nowadays, people have reported that some animals have been infected by this water. People's leisure space, their childhood memories, their ability to enjoy themselves and the construction of their identities are all afflicted by Slow Violence. PA's 'developmental' sewage concurs with Ariel's settlment's sewage and creeps up on people. Accordingly,

It is important to stipulate that the ethnic cleansing of sceneries and economies by pollution resulted too in the ethnic cleansing of names and memories. Gardens and communal fields are increasingly given designations related to garbage, sewage, and boars. This devastating political-ecology has altered one's identification with the place; It also supplanted a productive, beautiful past with the present's despicable, endemic and nauseous essence. These simultaneous processes of colonization and urbanization dessimated agricultural and leisure spaces, creating a point of no return to a spatial past full of mobility, engagement with land and enjoyment of space. This situation in Salfit district is an ecological disaster in progress. Time compunds this disaster, creating cycles of Israeli encroachment and failed PA developmental interventions.

The impotency of PA touches upon land-centered social relations. Before the advent of the PA, village leaders were more active. They risked their lives in standing before bulldozers when the Ariel Settlement was being built on peoples' land, and social defense/control was more effective when vested into on the village scale. However. As many stories attest, the advent of the PA has diluted the executive power of the village unit by putting the authority of the village Mukhtar(head chief), and later council, under the fist of a ministry of local governance. Nowadays, everything should be orchestrated by the PA, which happens to be crippled by the Oslo Accords. By the tone of people's blame on the PA's reaction toward wild boars, I contend that the PA has been disinterested, unable, and hadn't made the support of these villages a priority. The PA, instead, supplied people with big garbage containers dispersed in the village and erected open-air incinerators, which pollute every village and furnish an excellent shelter for wild boars. Consequently, The ecological expanse of village space is rewilded/confiscated, increasingly shrinking village space into a household space.

A very strong metaphor resonates in my mind when Abu Shadi from Iskaka reminisced about the' Jabal'; a flat top mountain which used to provide the village with a basket of edible wild plants. Abu Shadi designated this place as 'the soul of the village'. With its gradual confiscation, starting in 1986, people lost a crucial nutritional source and an authentic space for leisure.[54] Along with such a loss, people in Iskaka could observe how Ariel settlement is 'utilizing' the Jabal for the leisure, prosperity, and wellbeing of settlers. Many interviewees express how such observations compund their sense of loss and dismemberment of a village's soul.

A receding walking track connecting Iskaka's village center with its outer space. ©Saad Amira, Iskaka 2019

**A view of Ariel settlement engulfing the 'Jabal' part of Iskaka. ©Saad Amira, Iskaka 2019 ©Abed's, Al Jabal's playgroud before destruction, early1980s, featuring Iskaka's soccer team.*

Conclusion

This case study on the buildup of Settler colonial slow violence in Slafit governorate showcases the slow, incremental, perplexing workings of a set of interrelated human and non-human forces, coalescing in the form of a wild boar; an animalized technology of devastating effects. These workings of slow violence curtail mobility and deform landscapes, bodies, and memories, affecting structural spatial changes. These changes afflict Palestinian lifestyles and the pursuit of everyday life in rural space, reducing bountiful expansive villages into crammed village centers of built-up space, invaded by wild boars, sewage, burning garbage, and settlements.

However, the processes that culminate in that are discussed, elaborated on, and countered by the villagers themselves, with limited capabilities and weak representational scope beyond village space. This study explores these spatial dynamics and politicizes it by putting to the fore the voices, rants, smells, and feelings of people who are resisting/surviving with Settler-Colonial workings in progress. In doing so it situates Palestinian villagers as agents of knowledge/power production as they interact/resist/acquiesce in settler colonial processes. These experiences under Settler colonialism, provide a snapshot of settler colonialism in a particular place by rendering subaltern experiences as knowledge of historical value. Finally, this study does not provide an exhaustive exploration of all Settler Colonial dynamics in Salfit, however it informs synergies between Political Ecology, Settler Colonialism, Public Health and Development, by means of oral history and ethnographic engagement.

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