

SPACES OF TRUTH: PALESTINIAN REFUGEE WOMEN REFRAME CONCERNS OF JERUSALEM AND RESIST JUDAISATION

Professor Laura Houry

Department of Social and Behavioral Science
Birzeit University, Birzeit
West Bank, Palestine

ABSTRACT

Since the third Intifada (2014–2015) onward, refugee Nakba-generation women reframed concerns over Shu'fat refugee camp space in response to newer settler-colonial and spatial Judaisation practices in Al-Quds/Jerusalem; created a different relationality of space/time; gave accounts that are closer to the present, made the present a driving force for their action; transformed the courtyard (*hosh*) experience into a community bonding function; and created a new layer of resistance. The Nakba narratives were conveyed as part of the present, their belonging to Jerusalem became the 'truth of space', and their visual memory overcame the 'true now space'. Ultimately, their memory was a potential for creative collaboration between present consciousness and experiences of the past creating a 'relational solidarity in the living present'.

KEYWORDS: Al-Quds/Jerusalem, Shu'fat Refugee Camp, 3rd Intifada, Social Spacialisation, 'Living Present', Settler-colonialism, Judaisation, Disembodiment, Self-reflexivity, 'Ground-truthing'

Introduction: Reflexive Critical Knowledge Base

The following dialogue sums up the goal of the research paper:

- Female: 'we in Shu'fat refugee camp demand our right in staying in Jerusalem, not only our right of return. Even if this is a contradiction of its own. . . The occupation is trying to make us emigrate from here by all means, we have to be steadfast. . . This is why, a new beautiful

appropriate school in this camp is our right, and it will not affect our right of return, on the contrary, this is the onset of our return’.

- Male: ‘as if we want to be proud of the camp instead of resisting so as to return to our land and homes? I want to return to my home, I do not want you to beautify my camp, I refuse this idea totally’. .. ‘we demand of UNRWA the right to return not to beautify the camp’.
- Female: ‘what about our right to stay in Jerusalem? To struggle for our existence, don’t you all see the embargo imposed on us, so we do not leave the camp? I think anything new and appropriate here will help us be steadfast and stay’ (Hilal 2016: 9–10).

Today, Shu’fat refugee camp, the site of oppression, of experimentation and infusion of yet another level of settler-colonialism has turned further and further into a space of resistance from the third Intifada of late 2014 onwards. The arrival of the *wafideen* (newcomers), who now compose half of camp residents – in addition to the swelling of the illegal settlements surrounding the camp and the expansion of previous ones – the insertion of three new poorly-built high-rise buildings in the making of three new Palestinian neighborhoods (Ras Khamis – north – Ras Shehadeh – south – and Dahiet al-Salam or New ‘Anata-East) that circled the refugee camp, prevent the original camp from getting clean air and sun, while circling the three new neighborhoods and the refugee camp with an apartheid wall. This is an unprecedented, unlawful, apartheid Judaisation practice never seen before. But yet, this did not deter Palestinian refugees from turning this site of extreme oppression into a space of resistance!

Shu’fat refugee camp women’s memories (individual and collective) of pre-1948 space did not erode despite transforming the ‘now’ space – due to the systematic Judaisation of al-Quds – despite the rapid influx of Jerusalemites (*al-wafideen*) changing the physical, ecological and social space of the camp, and despite the evident failure of the Oslo agreement of 1993, and the Palestinian Authorities’ concessions thereafter. Today, this camp, that was once resided in exclusively by ‘original refugees’ (*‘asliyeen*)¹ refugees, is a place that is equally resided by ‘newcomers’ or *‘wafideen*’ (about 50%) did not erode as a space of resistance, a sight for reclaiming the right of return, or as a victorious space against the coloniser’s oppression. The advent of city women into the camp space slowed the de-traditionalisation of women’s place in the camp, but simultaneously, it also constructed a reflexive critical knowledge and power base for

1 Here, I refer to the ‘original’ refugees as *asliyeen* to mean those displaced in 1948 inside the Jerusalem walls in al-Mu’askar camp and displaced forcefully again in 1966 to Shu’fat refugee camp. The *wafideen* are Jerusalem residents who moved into the camp vicinity and in the three new neighborhoods that encircled the camp (from the North, South and East). In 2000–2002 an apartheid wall was built to circle all three neighborhoods and the camp – becoming a de facto exclusionary camp in Jerusalem.

refugee women as it added a new layer of resistance and plight for them as Jerusalemites. Women's memories, based on their lived experience of space and time, served as a source of cohesion with the *wafideen*, sharpened the path of resistance to colonisation, and attended to the crisis facing al-Quds/Jerusalem.

Palestinian refugee camp women's memories of the uprooting (al-Nakba², or the 1948 Catastrophe) are embedded in places that gave them strength to overcome their triple alienation (1948, relocated again in 1966, and today). But, there was a tendency to give accounts that are closer to the present, making the present a driving force for their action. Thus, the refugee camp's social space is both produced (by the original 1948 refugees) and a product to be consumed by *wafideen* (who moved there for convenience). 'Social Space can be shown to be a medium and outcome of social practice' (Brenner and Elden 2009: 372). Social space became both a field of action and a basis for action for all residents. Generally, for refugee camp residents, the process of breeding resistance to colonisation went uninterrupted. I identified how in reviving collective memory, when women are gathered, they exchange remembrances of events and drew on other's memories (see Zelizer 1995), and how the narratives about the past were conveyed as part of the present. I witnessed women come together, volunteer their time, money and gold, create a strong sense of community and produce a model of collective community resistance – thus, a *de facto* lived experience of space and revived sense of resistance.

Shu'fat refugee women's dislocation was not just that one time in 1948, their community, thereby, sense of belonging, has changed multiple times, and their paths collided and dispersed multiple times, but when their belonging to al-Quds became threatened it became the 'truth of space', it made their visual memory overcome the 'true space' of Jerusalem (the 'now' space). This presented a double-sided phenomenon: Due to colonisation, when speaking about the past: '... anything that disappears from your psychological inventory is apt to turn up in the guise of a hostile neighbour' (Jung 1988: 8), but anything that is spoken of conveys a rigid compartmentalisation of the subject within the time and space that is *the furthest removed* from themselves and the most damaged in the lens of the 'now' place. I ask: How did refugee women socially produce space without ruining their imagination or did they produce weaker copies of perceptual images of an old 'Nakba' in the 'now' space? How did remembering space become tied to the space in al-Quds, *per se*? Did the mental, sensory and lived space reveal clues about how the 'now' space became their homage and reverence? My aim is to examine this different relationality of space and time.

2 The Nakba is contextualised in the pure settler-colonial scheme-interpretive paradigm – a process of elimination by seeking land and replacing people.

I employ a ‘ground-truthing’ method³ to explore how spatial transformations made refugee women construct reflexive critical knowledge. I used field observations and analysed information about physical features of an area to understand the different modes of relationships between women, space and time. I also analysed the remotely-sensed memory of place (the physical features of the places of the past—abstract—space) in its interrelation with the changing space. I employ Lefebvre’s ‘conceptual triad’ (2004) as an analytical tool for conceptualising the life of refugee elderly women in conscious, interactive, relationship. As women collectively reflect on some memory from their past, they act on their sensory knowledge and experience in 1948, and re-evaluate and reconstruct that remote memory based on the ‘now’ eroded differential space. Any attempt at memorisation, especially when it is done for the purpose of decolonisation, requires turning to indigenous feminism and pursuing an anti-coloniality model. While feminist theorisation allows for a clear take on the negotiation between the insider/outsider (as in Shu’fat refugee camp *asliyeen/wafideen*), indigenous feminism enhances the narratives of dislocation, displacement and refugeedom. Additionally, an anti-coloniality model contextualise why Nakba tales were not interrupted despite colonial oppression. Continuity in displacement—displaced multiple times involuntarily—is a crude characteristic of Shu’fat refugee camp residents, and indigeneity, oral tradition, and storytelling guarantees continuity throughout generations. Thus, an indigenous lens is needed to unearth the development of new layers of resistance.

A Different Level of Colonialism and the Reframing of Concerns

Dana (2014) questions whether we Palestinians need to rewrite history one more time: will it lead to re-telling the past based on today’s realities—not on the desires that were widespread then. Masalha (2018) addresses how critical the production of collective memory is in shaping the way in which people construct and enrich their collective identity in the present. I will attend to how refugee women reframed newer concerns while narrating the Nakba.

³ Carp identified a ‘ground-truthing’ approach to understand the interrelationship of people and place deeply enough to ‘unearth the merits of competitive plans’ and to determine what intervention, if any may be appropriate’ (Carp 2009: 130). Her aim was to question how land development has been represented? My aim is to question *how spatial transformations made refugee women construct reflexive critical knowledge?*

a. The Socio-Spatial History of Shu'fat Refugee Camp

Shu'fat refugee camp is the only Palestinian refugee camp in al-Quds and has a double segregationist/distinctive status: the residents' refugee status that challenges the fundamental legitimacy of the racist nation's creation, and also, that it is in al-Quds/Jerusalem, the capital of Palestine that has been deferred, as a topic, from negotiations—exactly like the right of return. The refugee camp is a place where the poorest of Jerusalem live, an overcrowded-impoverished Palestinian discarded locked island and enclave in the heart of Jerusalem, that 'poses a demographic threat' according to the coloniser's colonial scheme. This refugee camp remains the most ignored and discarded by both the coloniser and the Palestinian Authority, and the most oppressed and vulnerable indeed. Also, it is neglected by UNRWA—to an extent, as it does not have the same level of involvement, due to the unique situation of the camp.⁴

Evicted forcefully from inside the walls of the old city of Jerusalem, al-Mu'askar refugee camp with its 150 families were expelled to Shu'fat 208 *dunums* (leased for 99 years by King Hussein of Jordan) Shu'fat refugee camp (built in 1965–1966) was called *Makab*, meaning a dump area but it is also outside the walls of Jerusalem. Haret al-Sharaf (*sharaf* meaning 'honour'), is a term that was coined by al-Mu'askar refugees to discourage Palestinians from moving to Shu'fat refugee camp—describing the new camp in Shu'fat as an un-honourable prostitution hot-spot. This all happened before the annexation of East Jerusalem! The new camp residents who lived in 500 two-rooms apartments came from 56 villages in West Jerusalem (e.g. Katamon, Lifta, Malha, Al-Walajah) as well as from al-Lidd, Ramle and Jaffa.⁵ With the subsequent outbreak of the 1967 War, Shu'fat refugee camp soon came to house additional refugees. Today, there are over 24,000 people living in Shu'fat refugee camp, of which 50% are registered refugees (12,500 registered refugees according to UNRWA 2015 report⁶).

4 Shu'fat refugee camp has a de facto exclusionary status as it is run by UNRWA that provides most services with the exception of some health services, UNRWA-run girls' and boys' primary schools, and major health care is obtained in Jerusalem. Residents rely on Jerusalem for employment.

5 Though some refugees left the camp after the 1967 war for the better quality life they flooded back into the camp beginning in the late 1990s, after the institution of a new policy revoking the Jerusalem residency rights of Palestinians whose 'centre of life' was not in the city. In a 2005 report, UNRWA estimated that around 4000 refugees had moved into the camp during 2002–2005.

6 https://www.unrwa.org/sites/default/files/shufat_refugee_camp.pdf

b. Different Level of Colonialism

The Judaisation and de-Arabisation of al-Quds is a complex amalgam of exclusion/transfer/wiping out process. It is particularly one practice, of many others, that aimed at depleting the cultural, geographical, historical roots of Palestinians in the land of Palestine and making it purely a land for Jewish people. Its artifacts are: erasure of the memory including changing towns, villages and city names, the eviction of people via genocide, removal, transfer, or wiping their identity, and the depletion of archeological sites (Masalha 2012). The process maintains the colonist's existence and creates a de facto status. To control Jerusalem and empty it of its original residents, the colonists began erasing the Palestinian identity since annexing East Jerusalem in 1967⁷, reaching a peak in 2008 (revoking Jerusalem permanent residency permits of 4,577 Palestinians). As a consequence, the camp's population swelled.

Following the Oslo Accords of 1993, two large illegal settlements⁸ in the vicinity of the refugee camp were built while at the same time older settlements adjacent to the camp expanded dramatically. The space surrounding the camp became tighter when bypass roads leading to the settlement blocs at the expense of more land and additional confiscation of massive areas of Palestinian land.⁹ Adding to the threat of cutting off the camp came the 'second Balfour' on December 6th 2017, when US President Trump announced the moving of the embassy to al-Quds/Jerusalem. Following that, he announced an upcoming 'deal of the century' discarding Palestinians even further.

c. Reframing of Concerns

Due to the systematic and continuous targeting of Jerusalemites, there began a framing of concerns of losing the Jerusalemite identity and an

7 Between 1967–2013 where some 14,200 Jerusalem identity cards were revoked, 3,100 between 1967 and 1995, and 11,000 between 1995 and 2013 (Ir Amim Report).

8 It is worth noting that during the write up of this article, for the first time the United States did not veto a decision at the United Nations which 14 countries out of 16 passed, that settlements are illegal but yet again, after that in December 2016, an announcement was made to build 5,000 more units.

9 'Ir 'Amim report (<http://www.ir-amim.org.il/sites/default/files/2.17%20Rising%20Cost%20of%20Peace.pdf>) explains that surprisingly, whenever progress in the 'peace process' emerged, the 'settlement reflex' was activated in response: in 2008, right after the Annapolis Conference, the 'Road Map' was produced. Subsequently, a record number of 1,931 housing units in East Jerusalem were tendered. The same in 2012, when the government faced increasing pressure and the United Nations voted to admit Palestine as a non-member state. In response, tenders were issued for 2,386 housing units. Yet again, in 2014 and 2016, in response to the diplomatic initiative by US Secretary of State John Kerry and following the collapse of his efforts, tenders for 2,620 housing units were issued, the US not vetoing the illegality of settlements.

increased emphasis on a Jerusalemite identity that has Arabic/Islamic civilisation roots in language, history, and culture. The Jerusalem-2000 Master Plan brought a dramatic change in the identity of the residents of the three new neighborhoods that surrounded the camp by basically redefining the borders of Jerusalem. The apartheid wall¹⁰ came to encircle the camp including all the new ill-planned new built high buildings that composed the three neighborhoods: Dahiet al-Salam (East), Ras Shehadeh (North), and Ras Khamees (West). The area that used to be 208 *dunums* (50 Acres) in 1967 had become 370 *dunums* by 2002, and the population in 2016 had become 16,547–20,000 (*asliyeen* and *wafideen*) from an original 3,386 (*asliyeen*) in 1967. The redefining of the borders of the city of Jerusalem aimed to ensure a Jewish majority and the monitoring of people who crossed the new checkpoint (about 10,000 daily). The refugees, due to the lack of space, were obliged to build vertically but the expansion horizontally was to accommodate new incoming families – those seeking cheaper rent than in the al-Quds/Jerusalem core.

Ironically, it is more likely that Shu'fat refugee camp will be left on the West Bank side of the apartheid wall and camp residents would need to be 'displaced' again as they attempt to find elsewhere in Jerusalem to move in and save their Jerusalemite identities from being revoked. Hypothetically, if Shu'fat refugee camp was swapped with other less dense areas, so as to get rid demographically of the number of Jerusalem residents who are crowded in the run-down and at-risk constructed areas, then those who caused a huge flow to the camp would eventually get their identity confiscated – after all. Thus, it is the very existence of Shu'fat refugee camp that challenges the existence of the coloniser.

Refugee women and men perceived the camps' cumbersome status differently, with men wanting solely to go back to their original pre-Nakba villages, but women, on the other hand, recounted the Nakba by framing newer concerns, expressing a worry about losing their Jerusalem identity and displayed an obsession with the place (the refugee camp). Women embraced the new *wafideen* city-women, beautified the camp space while they are still there and consolidated the sense of community in the 'now' post-Oslo eroded place, as a new way of resisting colonisation.

10 The route of the apartheid barrier in Jerusalem is gerrymandered to leave Shu'fat refugee camp and its residents outside of the city, leading to a limitation on movement of the camp's residents. Additionally, the residents of the camp must show their Jerusalem identity card, and those under the age of 16 (the age when the identity cards are issued) are being required to produce their original birth certificates at the checkpoint! Lastly, closing checkpoint of the western exit that should allow 5,000 people per hour to pass during the morning rush hour leaves them with one exit point only (Ir 'Amim report).

d. A socio-spatial and politico-economic framework

A political-economic analysis yields the following factors that brought the camp to the current status quo. First: building the wall in 2002 identified the area within the wall as the refugee camp as in the Jerusalem Master Plan 2000—redefined the borders of Jerusalem. Second: the influx of Jerusalemites in the form of a wave of those seeking cheaper rent, who compose the poorest of Jerusalem residents, so as to keep their Jerusalem identity card and its benefits—including health insurance. Third: the influx of 12,000 Bedouins who were pressured to resettle and came into the new vicinity in the form of a wave. Fourth: the development of ‘the neighborhood waves’ (*harat*) that had its roots in 1967–1970. Fifth: the influx of a new social category or class of traders that came in to invest and serve the working class refugees and residents in the camp starting since the mid-1980s and continuing till 2006—also in the form of a wave. Sixth: the expansion of previously built settlements and the building of two new illegal settlements that border the camp and limit the amount of land surrounding the camp until the wall was built in 2002. Seventh: The 2020 plan of Jerusalem excludes the new neighborhoods but includes the fast train route that takes more lands from New Anata and Shu’fat proper. Eighth: the Palestinian Authority’s blind eyes and lack of real statehood makes the fight for survival in this locked prison a private matter. Ninth: the systemisation of the Judaisation/de-Arabisation process. Tenth: the spread of new unsafe buildings, though it sounds like it is a random phenomenon, was systematically planned in favor of the coloniser in his attempt at controlling negotiations over Jerusalem and nullifying the right of return as a core rights for refugees.

e. Delinking the refugee problem from local, national and international discourse

Marginalising the Palestine refugee question, especially since Oslo, and delinking it from the local, national and international discourse on Palestine, has become the new normal. At the local level, where the contentious issue of al-Aqsa (3rd Intifada core issue), the collective punishments, the daily friction with the colonists (when compared to the West Bank) makes everywhere a space of possible encounter. Lastly, the adoption of neo-liberal free market ideology by a weak dependent Palestinian Authority led further to a clear split between contradictory ideologies of concession and resistance, in which the refugees must (and wish) to choose the latter. The aggressive campaigns of intimidation, collective restrictions of movement, neglect of the physical and social infrastructure of the camp, allowing rapid unplanned construction contributed to the severe conditions of a camp. The purpose

of this systematic process is to make Shu'fat refugees become differentiated from Palestinians, a process called ethnogenesis.¹¹ This is a very precarious process that has the colonial regime's imprint all over it. The divide and conquer strategy meets with the policy of canonisation of the indigenous population. All this is coupled with a process of defying the refugee identity and status for the dwellers of the camp. Ethnogenesis is an imposed structural process that aligns with genocide and the Judaisation of Palestine – not only Jerusalem.

Disembodiment, Social Spatialisation and the 'living present'

Lefebvre ([1974; 1991) reminds us that all space we encounter, complex or untouched or natural is an 'absolute space' and is a product constructed – not just a reflection of power relations but constitutive of a specific historical social reality and a collective sense of everyday life. The refugee camp space is a critical component of the reproductive mechanism of Palestinian society, it perpetuates the relations of power in the settler colonial model. The camp space is extraordinarily dense, adjacent to the city, and its survival is dependent on appropriating it. By changing the social space, the shape and value of the socio-political struggles change too. In every moment, space is used in a variety of ways encompassing the physical, mental, and social aspects of space – simultaneously. Initially, Lefebvre notes that cities are geographical spaces treated under capitalism just like other commodities (in other words, 'spaces' have exchange and public use value too). With spatial-colonial practices and neo-liberal economics, 'spaces' have become a tool for capital accumulation.

The politics of space in Shu'fat refugee camp is quite complex. On one hand, Judaisation as one spatial-colonial practice, created an enclave that engulfed the *wafideen* with the *asliyeen* – the most discarded, using Mbembe's (2003) terminology, the 'living dead' and Agamben's (1998) description, 'reduced to bare life', on the other hand, similar to other processes of urban marginality, like camp-squatting phenomenon, residents attempt to make spaces 'ordinary' by reclaiming a 'normal' life and creating a 'home'. The refugees attempted to create a normal life and space and an autonomous space that belongs to all. Sanyal (2014) suggests that refugee spaces can be seen as important sites for articulating new politics and can come to resemble slums when, in fact, they have existed for many years she even asks if they are forms of 'emergency urbanism' used to house displaced populations. Additionally, Sanyal (2014) suggests that despite the preordained assumption that camps are for non-citizens, they can be spaces for contestation of national citizenship and the

11 See analysis in Khoury 2000, with William Sturvent quoted in Rosman et. al. (1998: 320).

production of new urban citizenship, and that the intimate and everyday spatiality of refugee spaces remains under-explored. I hope just to do that.

Spatial studies and informed research about gender and how best to understand the relationship between neo-liberal capitalism and the changes in places are relevant here; but there is also a need for an interactive analysis. I borrow Massey's (1990) idea that 'space' is not void, where what is feminine is: nostalgia, space-boundedness and stability (vs. what is masculine: historical progress, temporality and transcendence). In other words, geography matters to gender. Gendering space as an outcome of colonial conquest is one thing and how women conceptualised colonial space is another, thereby, I ask: should Palestinian refugee women develop a sense of alienation or disorientation in the form of loss of control each and every time (we counted at least three ruptures) they get displaced? It is accurate to say that relationship between space and gender is found in gender identity – never fixed – and public performance tend to reinforce this gender identity (Butler 1990).

Lastly, time, the worldly time – not the natural earthly dimension of it – is also a social construct that orders the social world. It is given a meaning through social practices indeed. Giddens (1990) suggests a disembedding process referring to the changing nature of social relations – which can be maintained across time and space through trust. The way to have time and space invigorated is to perceive them constantly in a state of influx, which allows integrating factors such as gender and social class. Therefore, 'place remains the central axis of life, our time. . . Places differ as much as we do. . . They all cater to different types, and each has its own personality, its own soul' (Giddens 2008:7). Thus, both time and space have a subjective significance for men and women as they construct them in their daily rhythmic life. It is worth mentioning that, this study is in line with Hanafi's (2008) critique of scholars who see the Palestinian refugee camp as an entity which carries the whole weight of Palestinian history and not as an entity capable of being a normal urban space.

I postulate that, on one hand, the relationship between space and gender is culturally inscribed, and, on the other hand, that there is an ongoing 'social spatialisation', (as termed by Shields 1991:31) a process by which the refugees give meaning to the camp space through socio-spatial practices. So, 'spatialisation is a formation not a framework, a function more than a principle' (Shields 63). I borrow from Husserl's (1991) phenomenology, especially his notion of the *living present*, where every experience has a temporal background and where spatial objects are temporal. In line with this conception, the present is always constituted as a relation of the past to future. I argue that the very nature of space and the very nature of time is relational, and attending to the present

and ‘now’ space requires a ‘different relationality’. The model explains why Palestinian refugee women are the ones that protect a vision of an alternative future as they precisely express worry over losing their citizenship in al-Quds/Jerusalem. It is a three dimensional interactive model as follows:

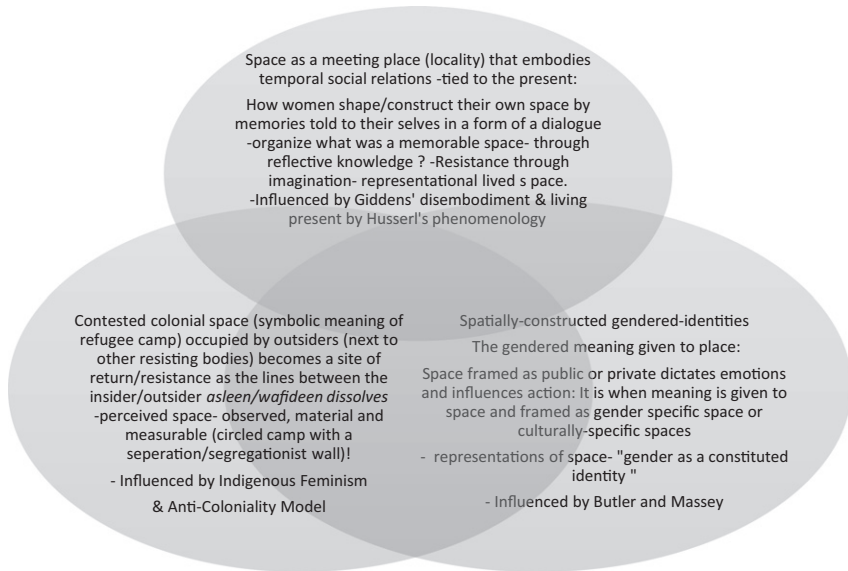


Figure 1.

I was guided by indigenous feminism that views research as interconnected and relational, with a praxis-oriented/participatory approach, an honest, humble, open, willing to know, respecting differences, trusting, patient and thus long-term and based on continuous presence in the community. Ground-truthing practice helped tying the different relationality in making them be seen as dynamic—not static—between the physical proximity of space, the conceived space and the experiential lived space. I combined field observations of camp space spanning three years 2013–2017, in-depth participation and visitations with eight Nakba generation refugee women (see table 1) spanning three years—soon after the 3rd Intifada started—October 2014–August 2016, and a content analysis of media messages and women’s gatherings all through these three years. I revisited women to follow up on some interviews and witnessed new colonial spatial practices which also helped shape this work.

Table 1. Table of wiped villages of interviewees date, number then, number refugees and land lost

<i>Interviewees</i>	<i>Age</i>	<i>Village – Area *</i>	<i>Day/Moth Wiped</i>	<i>1948 Population</i>	<i>Refugees made</i>	<i>Lost Land Dnn.</i>
Um Shadi	83	Beit-Tool *	1/04/1948	302	1,852	4,205
Um Ziad	73	Beit Muheiser*	10/05/1948	2,784	17,097	15,428
Um Saad	78	Kherbet al-Loz *	13/07/1948	522	3,206	4,495
Um Hussein	84	Sarees *	01/04/1984	626	3,847	3,769
Um Nidal	79	al-Dawayneh **	29/11/1948	4,304	26,429	60,561
Um Walid	74	Beit Natif **	21/10/1948	2,494	15,315	32,760
Um Na'el	88	Deir Ayoob ***	06/03/1948	371	2,280	4,500
Um Ali	81	al-Walajah *	21/10/1948	1,914	11,754	17,708
Total: 8 women intensively visited	Average 80	Mostly in Jerusalem	All Villages wiped in 1948	Ranges 100's and 1,000's	Ranges 2,000–25,000	Ranges 4,000–60,000

* al-Quds ** al-Khalil *** al-Lidd and Ralmeh

Places of their Own Making: Closer to the Present Accounts

'Mother tell my brothers and sisters: When I decided to love, I loved the refugee camp'

(A martyr's Graffiti)

Space, in particular the visual memory of space, is the geographical map and memory at work, through experiencing space one negotiates the daily routes (see Coombes 2003). But space is relational too; it is representational of social relations, including gender relations:

Feminist spatial readings propose that space itself can offer resistance to gender hierarchies. A critical focus on the nexus between gendered space and spatially constructed gender identities might offer a promising approach for alternative gender configurations. The understanding of space as multiple, shifting, heterogeneous, situational, and contested may help subvert the oppressor-oppressed paradigm, the opposition between those with power to shape knowledge and spatial practice and those who suffer them (Wrede 2015: 10) (italics added)

In fact, I identified how Nakba generation women recounted resistance in the framing of newer concerns, especially in expressing worry over the revoking of their Jerusalemite identity cards. I saw how their current homes are their own making, not only the structure of the house, but also what they do when they get together with other women, and whom to socialise with and how. As they recount tales they create a knowledge base that yields revival of their collective memories, they construct a reflexive critical base connecting the past to the present and the space in the diaspora with the space in the village. But still, the fear of yet another involuntary removal from Jerusalem overwhelms the discussions in social gatherings. Nakba Generation women understood space as multiple, shifting and contested indeed.

Um Hussein, an 82-year-old, from the destroyed village of Sarees, who met Abu Hussein in al-Mu'askar camp, describes the space in al-Mu'askar refugee camp as more cramped and crowded and the streets smaller but it was a space of comfort, as a social space due to the lived experience (Khoury 2018). Um Hussein fears losing her Jerusalemite identity card and her dream to return to Sarees. She spoke about how she remodeled her home-space in the camp and this was an illustration of my hypothesis that Jerusalem became the 'truth of place'. She built a high cemented entrance adjacent to an inner open-air space. The idea is to get the most of the sun and less of the street noise. Her husband kept saying but this is temporary, we are returning to our village, he then admits that his wife wanted to create 'heaven from within'.

Um Shadi, an 83-year-old widow from Beit Thool, described the space of the refugee camp when they first arrived. It was a memory at work. In her tale, water abundance in the village before 1948 was fundamental

(Khoury 2018) but when they arrived at the camp, every memory was tied to the abundance of water, or its rarity otherwise. In her description of the camp she continued negotiating the daily routes of water dispatches. It seems to be the basis of social relations, especially gender relations, as she explained:

Water is shared collectively by all and we would fill the water day after day. You were allowed 6 tanks only. They gave us zinc barrels. You would fight with others near the fountain as everyone had to wait for his turn. So, 80 people used to drink from one fountain in the camp. Whoever gets their first, gets to fill the water first. However, we had to fill water that should last us for two or three days. Once, we are out of water we go to the neighbors for more, this is how we connect together at the time.

Back to al-Mu'askar refugee camp, Um Shadi sheds light on the significance of place. The type of work she did and the competition over transporting water, as well as the relationship between the refugees and the 'foreigners':

Every one of the refugees worked as transporters of water. Young and old. Our job and the way to make money in Haret al-Yahood was to transport water to foreigners, Jews, and Christians. This is what we all were competing over: transporting water. There is no land and trees and no abundance of water-like in Yalo. Still, we felt bad for each other.

Um Shadi asked me to bring her a picture that was hanging on the wall of her husband, a few of her kids and herself when she was young. The picture was taken as soon as they arrived in Shu'fat refugee camp—when she had only four of her kids. She was a mother of 16 kids, 8 girls and 8 boys—but two had died. She pointed directly at the wall behind her as there were three zinc tanks hanging on the wall which were used for planting. She explains 'these zinc UNRWA tanks were used to fill water in the *hosh*', as if power were in the hands of the few who own water. She said:

In Beit Anan, when we used to go out to pick fallen wood or figs or oregano the village residents used to kick us out. It is ridiculous because back in our village, before al-Nakba, we never had to ask for permission to collect fallen wood. The family that used to have one cow was in control of all the other families. The cow was a source of power. Because if you own a cow you can carry water! Water makes everything alive, it is life itself.

Um Nidal, a 79-year-old from the destroyed village of al-Dawaymeh, described the relative size of the current camp, when it was compared to the one they were forced to evacuate from: Haret al-Sharaf. She said: 'the camp was spacious, with trees, and communal water fountains'. Coming from al-Dawaymeh that almost stepped into the urban world before the Nakba, with its popular markets and wealth, made her nostalgic, as she

displayed her attachment to places they lived in. She constantly measured things by the level of community support—how they were treated/felt welcomed—but also what’s across from the bridge, especially that forest. When she talked about al-Quds she looked relaxed. As she says:

But al-Dawaymeh would have become a big city by now. It would have become a beautiful city. Everything was all set and prepared just the asphalt. This is why the Jews took it as they did not want it to become a big city. See now, they took al-Quds. We are Jerusalemites! This is our only identity. What do they want from it too? Shu’fat refugee camp is just a gathering place for people expelled from all over.

We left al-Khalil and went to Ein al-Sultan refugee camp in Jericho. I made many friends there. Everyone cared for us because we were from al-Dawaymeh. But we had to leave and move to Haret al-Sharaf near the al-Haram al-Shareef. We rented a nice two rooms from a family and bought furniture from Dandees, do you know Dandees? He was the best carpenter in Jerusalem. I was comfortable there. We lived next to our cousins. But we were kicked out from our home. I never took my furniture! When we arrived to Shu’fat refugee camp we had to buy a room because the rooms were taken.

The camp looked so spacious. There were separate rooms and much space between them. The distance between one unit and the other was very spacious. There were pine trees here. See this wall, next to that wall was a tree. We had one shared fountain for every few homes and there were shared bathrooms too. On the other side of the camp up the hill there used to be a nice forest and the kids used to go spend the day there for enjoyment. It was all empty here and it was so spacious.

Um Na’el—88-year-old—from Deir Ayoob, described social activities like washing clothes collectively and weddings at Shu’fat refugee camp, saying:

We met my husband’s aunts in Haret al-Siknaj. There were refugees from Doorra, al-Masmyeh, Kustinyeh. They used to go to Lifta and come back. They used to intermarry from each other. ‘*Yikta’hen*’ [God cut them in half], women and girls were not like this. Older women used to go but girls no. When women want to wash their clothes near the water spring they used to do that at once [before dispossession]. All of them together and before men came. When men walk in homes they scream out loud so women and girls hide in other rooms.

On my wedding day, I wore a city white dress, not the traditionally knitted peasant dress. My father did not approve so he covered me with an ‘*aba’ya*’ (men’s large cover) and he knitted it from top down so it did not show my dress. The better reputation the family had the bigger was the *Jaha* (people who on the wedding day go to get bride from her parent’s house). The ceremony was planned well and there should be no mistake: the celebration was for ten days. These ten days were like the only entertainment for girls

and women as they kept dancing and chanting. They would remain in *al-harah* (the neighborhood). We occupied the streets of the refugee camp.

Women, when describing their activities during leisure time, relate it to a place: *al-harat* – as it becomes their territory. Men's roles were to maintain the tradition and make sure that the *Jaha* had to be representative of the family reputation, the dress code, and ensure women leave when men are around.

While describing the shared water fountain in Shu'fat refugee camp, Um Waleed, 74 years old from Beit Nateef, explained how they used to wait in line with their *zinc* barrels. She said: 'Women used to get together by the water fountain and sometimes play games with water'. She explained that it was a women's chore to bring the water home and that when they went by the fountain, men disappeared. 'I enjoyed playing with the girls my age, but we had to go back because my brothers and father were waiting to take a bath'.

Um Shadi was 21 when she got married, so was Um Hussein. Their wedding ceremonies, in the refugee camp, followed the traditional *Jaha* ritual, which was indicative and symbolic of their status. In women's gatherings, though they get dragged into talking about the *Jaha* and how big it was, they also talked about their dreams of getting educated. 'Most of the third generation of the refugees are getting educated' said Um Shadi.

Um 'Ali, who is 81-year-old, from al-Walajah was not the only one to speak about how spacious Shu'fat refugee camp was then, but, in her reflections, every space she has been to after the Nakba was small. Her best friend, Um Ziad, a 73-year-old, from Beit Muiheiser, recited the same story about how they managed to remain living together. They were neighbors in Haret al-Sharaf and later she had to fight to get her to live next door in Shu'fat refugee camp. Um 'Ali says:

I was 13-year-old when we left al-Walajah and I was married early. The day I went to the court my mother dressed me with a short dress so I look small in age. This did not work but I felt bad because I ended up getting married with such a terrible dress. I always blamed my mother! When he saw me the second time, he said: did you replace the woman I married? He was tricked, he said. When he saw me he asked where was the short woman, this woman is tall.

The social significance of *al-Hosh* strengthens kinship ties, which also means a gendered space – emphasizing patriarchy too. Um Sa'ad, a 78-year-old from Kherbet al-Loz, said her kids bought her an apartment outside the camp in the West Bank but she refused to leave the camp. She said: 'where would I find women like Um Shadi and many other women of the camp'. Interestingly, Um Shadi's gatherings had a very powerful effect. Women gather there almost every other day, they talk

about old times, they socialised and laughed but they also used all that as a knowledge base of what was going to happen to Jerusalem. Ultimately, the contested colonial space is being resisted by reclaiming it, renaming it and reinstating a sense of community –as in the next section.

Refugee Women Produce a Lived Social Space of Inclusion

*I will not accept to be a refugee woman in my country, it is enough you
drove us out of it: We are staying here*
(Graffiti)

Nandy (1983) explores the ways in which colonialism damaged the colonised societies themselves, and how the Indians broke with traditional norms of Western culture to protect their vision of an alternative future. Additionally, Thiong (1986) maintains that ‘the higher and more creative culture of resolute struggle. . . have to wield even more firmly the weapons of the struggle contained in their cultures. They have to speak the united language of struggle contained in each of their languages. They must discover their various tongues to sing the song: ‘A people united can never be defeated’ (1986: 3). Palestinian women, as I will show in this section, have, in their collective defiance, resisted colonialism by building on the lifestyle, values, and memories of Palestinians in pre-1948 Palestine and by heeding dissenting voices. They, in fact, managed to diminish the lines between the *asliyeen* and the *wafideen*.

The refugee camp space, by its mere existence, is a resisting body – until the right of return is granted – which suggests that it inherently must opt for the resistance (as opposed to the concessions) path. In other words, the refugee camp spatially remained the medium for resistance as the right of return became the signifier for the refugee camp. Twenty five years after the Oslo Accords, production transferred from a semi-agricultural to a service based mode in which the Palestinian Authority acted as a mediator for neoliberal economic growth. For the refugees, the individualistic spirit inherent in neoliberalism came as a disappointment. It is not accidental that the refugees were the most affected by individualistic tendencies! However, refugee women, as in the following example, overturned the loss of community effect and defied individualism in its neo-liberal impact.

In the 3rd Intifada, similar to the 1st Intifada, unified national committees developed, but they were more spontaneous and less organised.¹² So, popular campaigns developed around some sub-causes

12 The Second Intifada of 2000 sprang out of the day-to-day unbearable apartheid system devised from the womb of the ‘Oslo peace process.’ The ultimate enemy remains the colonisation but the ultimate outcome was the creation of a dual society: one that is for resistance and the other for concessions, but the refugees, specifically had no choice

and sufferings (for example the committee to regain the martyrs' corpses, or the campaign I am not leaving Jerusalem – *mish tale*) they were not supported by any political party (and not the Palestinian Authority), they were never funded and they ended as the singular sub-cause ended too. Specific to the camp was the sub-cause to rebuild the martyr Al-Akari's house – which developed later as an anti-colonial national campaign to rebuild demolished homes – in response to the practice of demolition of homes as collective punishment.

Ibrahim al-Akari, a camp refugee, was killed on 5 November 2014. In few weeks, soldiers raided the refugee camp, but with resistance from camp youth (*wafideen* and *asliyeen*) they were hindered from demolishing al-Akari's house – located in the inner circle of the original camp. This failed attempt at applying a segregationist policy of house demolitions of martyrs' family homes, did not end there. On 2 December 2015, the refugee camp witnessed the spectacle-invasion of 1200 troops to the camp, at four in the morning, when no one was yet awake or the streets, – televised through electronic media, and demolished al-Akari's house. The rubble from the house polluted the air for hours, as it was televised. The scene of the spectacle-like military march of the soldiers was interpreted as their way to 'regain their respect' in response to multiple failed attempts at entering the camp.

As the events were unfolding, that evening, a campaign to collect money to rebuild the house of the martyr began. I saw a car driving around the camp with a sign on its windshield saying 'we will build the house' (in Arabic). A refugee woman told me 'we were all together in this, we gave our money, but they (the *wafideen*) gave more money than we did'. Another woman spoke about her son getting injured at the entrance of the refugee camp during the military spectacle, she said: '*al-shabab* [young men] from the upper part of the camp (*wafideen*) brought him home'. Another woman said she saw them at the martyr's house too. 'There was a woman who gave her bracelet', said another woman, 'but no one knew who she was', referring to her as a woman from the *wafideen*. Others commented on how after the woman gave her bracelet, all other women started giving their gold. This solidarity between women, I was told, was unusual at the start: 'they all come together in times of hardship. They are one when they face the coloniser' explained another woman.

but, yet again, to stand by the resistance because 'their' right of return was at stake due to the Palestinian Authority's concessions. The Third Intifada of October 2014 was ignited by the burning of 'Ali Dawabsheh and his family by settlers in Nablus village in August of 2014 and the following day, near Ofar prison, the youth started protesting and that day ended with the martyrdom of Layth al-Khalidi from the Jalazoon refugee camp. It was the beginning of a revolt indeed. It began in an unorganised way, remained unsupported by any political party, with a broad agenda (al-Aqsa specifically).

Here, the space and ecology of the land did not stand in the way of interaction between the zones¹³ – when it was so formal before the 3rd Intifada, I was told. The interaction is now intra-zones. Women were imitating each other. The news media, in fact, wrote about this solidarity: ‘it set a precedent’. Al-Akari’s wife and kids slept in a new apartment that was secured by one of the *wafideen* in the newer buildings. Additionally, their demolished house was rebuilt in 48 hours, a volunteer builder finished it, another installed the utilities, another painted it, and many others filled it with furniture, the fridge, oven and a complete set of all the electrical tools. The news highlighted this collective solidarity. Shu’fat refugee camp residents presented a new anti-colonial collective defiance, and women were leading by example. ‘This is how Shu’fat refugee camp’s sons responded to the demolition of the house of the martyr Ibrahim al-Akari’.¹⁴

Yesterday more than 1,200 Israeli soldier participated in a full military operation with their equipment and support from a helicopter and dozens of snipers, demolished and bombed the home of the martyr al-Akari, and after a confrontation the locals found an alternative by fully furnishing a family home. Their participation in raising funds was stunning, and unprecedented, but they established what ought to be done, and began working in groups like bees at work and processed to re-build the house of the martyr again. . . Just hours after the bombing of the house, the youth spontaneously with honesty some of them cut the iron, and some used shovels and bowls, as others transferred the waste, bricks, and stones and rebuild the house in full within 3 days. The beginning was very encouraging when dozens of people raced to secure a new temporary home for the family some real estate donated a house Dealers, and the donations of furniture and electrical appliances, and materials full ration for the house rolled right after. The wife of the martyr, Um Hamza moved to a new home with her five children and spent the night in it. She added: ‘It was a touchy wrap of people in the camp around us and a great gesture to console us. . . . And you could see the crowds of people working like bees to rebuild what was destroyed by the occupation, and with high spirit of national and social unity in what becomes a role model that requires to be circulated all over the country’.

13 We see the camp to be a three-layered zone spatially: the inner core zone is the original refugee camp (known as Hosh – many Hoshes, or family areas), the transition second zone has a mixture of a few refugees who managed to build better rooms for themselves and the newcomers Jerusalem merchants who came to invest opening stores, hairdressers, and all other services (non-governmental organisations, schools, clinics, clubs). Then, the *newcomer’s* zone, that encircles the camp from three sides with high buildings standing side-by-side – unsafe, as soil erosion is predicted, limited sun, wind suppression affecting residents’ health, and possible falling.

14 3 December 2015: al-Quds Online: <http://alquds-online.org/index.php?s=news&id=4900>

In other daily journals 'the significance of the social popular incubator'¹⁵ was highlighted, referring to how the types of people who volunteered, especially those from the private sector (like realtors) confirmed the involvement of various social classes in the popular resistance—referring to the *wafideen*. The day after, the news highlights were referring to the ability to collect 95,000 Israeli shekels in 6 hours.¹⁶ After 24 hours the amount became 320,000 shekels (\$86,000). (Some journals highlighted how ironically, the operation to enter the camp and demolish a house costs the colonist 20 million shekels—(\$5 million). 'A will that embraced al-Akari family' was highlighted on the 13th of December in the campaign of 'they demolish and we build'.¹⁷ After a few days on 7 December 2015, Nablus initiated a similar collection effort for building three demolished martyrs' houses and the news highlights were: 'after the unique experience of Shu'fat refugee camp where the people in the camp came to the fundraiser to rebuild the home of the martyr Ibrahim al-Akari, was a beacon for the people of Nablus so as to re-apply the same experience'.¹⁸ On December 14th, in Nablus alone, a million shekels (\$250,000) was gathered from donations and the news highlights were 'Shu'fat refugee camp formulated a collective solidarity model'.¹⁹ Last, but not least, the collection for martyr Muhannad Halabi, the igniter of the 3rd Intifada, that was one of the most popularised took place on 16 January 2016. Female students at Birzeit University gave their gold (crosses and rings) and we were told that some jeweler had bought them at triple their value and donated them to the museum there.

At the camp, the solidarity I witnessed how the *wafideen* experienced the refugee camp as a space of resistance. Urban ethnographers should have variously hypothesised about certain aspects of the use of symbolic boundaries as spatial practices but have not elaborates explicitly on how identification to a group develops. The *wafideen* have no direct ties to the Nakba but they now imagine the space they live in as a space of resistance. The tales of al-Nakba and the persistence to attain the right to return through steadfastness became part of the group identity. How do the cognitive maps or the mental representations of the refugee camp

15 Rasem Obeidat, 3 December 2015: <http://www.qudsn.ps/article/79744>

16 December 4th 2015: <https://www.shasha.ps/news/174442.html> This page has an image of a private car that was circulating around the camp to collect money from camp residents. You will see pictures of blanket donations and a gathering of young men counting the money.

17 13 December 2015. The Palestinian Information Center: <https://www.palinfo.com/news/2015/12/13/>-إرادة تحتضن-عائلة الشهيد الكعاري-

18 7 December 2015: <https://www.palinfo.com/news/2015/12/6/>-جبل النار إعمار-منازل-الأحرار----رسالة-عطاء-وتحدثمن--

19 15 December 2015: <http://paltimes.net/post/115023/>- مليون-شيكل-عينا- ونقدا-لصالح-إعمار-منازل-المقاومين-بنابلس

affect the behavior and attitude of the residents? The *wafideen* reframing their identity as the group's identity is thus a spatial position. This is what Blumer referred to as reconceiving the sense of group position as the sense of place (1958 & 1993).

By Way of Conclusion: The *Hosh* Phenomenon

*We are steadfast in the refugee camp, even if they demolish the
house on us. . . We are not leaving*
(Graffiti)

Today, the sites of oppression and discrimination turned into spaces of resistance (Pile and Keith 1997). During the 3rd Intifada, women organised themselves collectively and attended to the needs of all other mothers. As they closed the social distance between themselves and the *wafideen*, they actually developed a shared language with them, they sustained a resistance culture and negotiated their vulnerability as women, as refugees and as colonial subjects. From an analysis of their discursive practices, it is clear that their Nakba tales were a source of power socially to produce a place—that is meaningful to them. Their discourses were an action not merely a representation. The categories they employed were focused around public activities and the meaning that was negotiated in relation to time and space.

I constantly heard women saying things like we are '*al-Thawaleh*', meaning those who came from Beit Thoola and '*Umwaseen*' meaning those who came from Umwas. This shows that even with the harsh transformation of colonial space in the 'now' refugee camp, and due to the spatial practices of the settler-coloniser—systematic Judaisation of Jerusalem—their sense of belonging to kinships and villages were strengthened. This may be a double-edged sword, on one hand it is a point of weakness and on the other a point of strength. First, calling the *wafideen* neighborhoods based on where they come from, like Haret al-Khalaileh (al-Khalaileh), thus replicating the *Hosh* phenomenon, may drastically work against all the refugee women did by closing the gap between the *wafideen* and themselves, but also I heard refugee women saying how 'the '*wafideen*' are now our allies against one enemy, al-Khalyleh and al-Thawaleh, hand in hand against *al-yahood*' [Israeli Jews]. This is an example of how it is used as a point of strength.

Current camp residents (*wafideen* and *asliyeen*) are resisting spatial domination and the resistance is within the structure itself too (see Butler's work). Women have the agentive capacity of making their own histories (as in Sayigh 1998). Women cannot live an ordinary life under colonisation but recreated camp space as a sight of resistance and made the camp a space

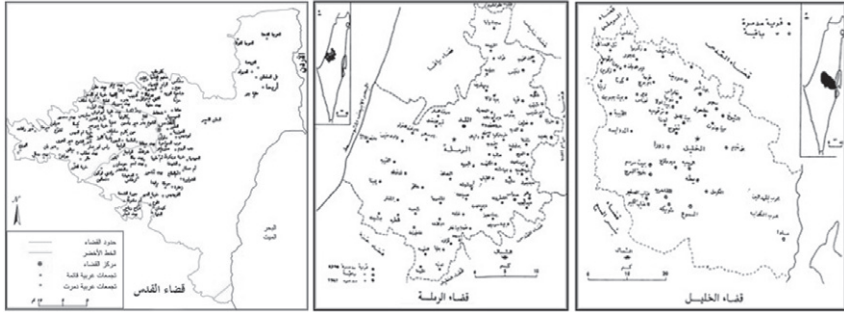


Figure 2. (a) Villages surrounding Jerusalem; (b) Villages surrounding al-Ramleh; (c) Villages surrounding al-Khalil.

of inclusion, when it was aimed to be one of exclusion by the colonists. Time and space were constructed in the daily rhythmic life, and women specifically relate to spaces and places in terms of identification (Brenner 1998), representation through language, and thinking spatially. They are the ‘living present’ par excellence.

On 24 January 2017 I witnessed yet another new spatial segregationist practice by the coloniser as they raided the refugee camp. But this time, not like all previous raids, it was to impose traffic laws. The incident outraged the camp residents, *wafideen* and *asliyeen*, as the story was aired ‘they never dared to come in and impose traffic laws’. The reaction was: ‘he occupation reached its peak in trying to penetrate the camp’ but, we believe, they did not capture Shu’fat refugee camp’s imagination yet. Ethnic cleansing, annexation, land grab, and theft was done using collective measures, but these same measures are the source of empowerment for men and women alike. Public speaking in the refugee camp space that day denoted that with every parlance, the camp residents (*wafideen* and *asliyeen*) would stand by each other. As I was leaving the camp that day, I heard the song played out loud from someone’s car: ‘I am Jerusalem’s son and I am not going to be removed from it, I am staying in it’ (Kefah Zreiki song – which was used as a motto for the *mish tali* – I am not leaving campaign during the 3rd Intifada).

Ultimately, I explored how when refugee women attended to the politics of space and *time*, their ‘...memory is neither something pre-existent and dormant in the past nor a projection from the present, but a potential for creative collaboration between present consciousness and the experience or expression of the past’ (Boyarin 1994: 22). I illustrated how women recreated the family experience, the home space, the camp space as it interacts with spaces from the past. Their adaptability and attendance to the transformations to the current space, and al-Quds per se,

is unmatched by their counterparts (men in this case). Also, I explored how women made sense of the space and time nexus reflecting on the different ‘level of settler colonialism’, or ‘the extent to which a colonizing power installs economic, political, and socio-cultural institutions in a colonised territory’ (Mahoney 2010: 23). As I revise this paper, on 6 December 2017, 100 years after the Balfour Declaration, President Trump announces moving the American embassy to Jerusalem (al-Quds) and the third Intifada continues: news of the first injury in the clashes is of a young boy from Shu’fat refugee camp.

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