



**The Institute of Women's Studies  
Gender and Development Studies**

**Colonial Housing Policies in Occupied Jerusalem and its Effects  
on Families' Dynamics and Life Tactics**

**تأثير سياسات الإسكان الإستعمارية على ديناميكيات الأسرة و تكتيكات الحياة اليومية  
في القدس المحتلة**

**Master's Thesis Prepared by: Areen Naser Qersh**

**Thesis Discussion Date: 21<sup>st</sup> of May, 2013**

**Discussion Committee**

**Dr. Lena Meari**

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**Dr. Lamis Abu Nahleh**

**This thesis was submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the  
Master's Degree in Gender and Development Studies from the Faculty of  
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## I. Abstract

Far away from the romantic discourse in depicting the holiness of life in the Old City of Jerusalem, this research investigates the reality of living through the eyes of women suffering from inadequate housing conditions. This research also tracks women's coping strategies, survival and resistance methods in a colonial context. Moreover, it attempts to understand the social, familial and household arrangements that emerge in everyday life without assuming that familial collaboration applies to all Jerusalemite families subjected to cruel colonial housing policies that aim at erasing their presence. Therefore, this research examines the kinds of conflict or tension that arises in the household and the ways through which it is being tackled under the colonial technique of housing deprivation.

### ملخص

بعيدا عن الخطاب الرومانسي في تصور قداسة الحياة في البلدة القديمة في القدس، هذا البحث يدرس واقع الحياة من خلال تجربة النساء اللواتي يعانين من ظروف سكنية غير ملائمة. حيث يرصد هذا البحث استراتيجيات التأقلم والبقاء والمقاومة التي توظفها المرأة في السياق الاستعماري. وعلاوة على ذلك، فإنه يحاول فهم الترتيبات الاجتماعية والعائلية التي تظهر في الحياة اليومية من دون افتراض وجود تعاون عائلي مسلم به بين افراد الأسر المقدسية التي تتعرض لسياسات الإسكان الاستعمارية القاسية و التي بدورها تهدف إلى محو وجودهم. لذلك، يتناول هذا البحث أنواع الصراع أو التوتر الذي ينشأ بين افراد الأسرة و المجتمع الواحد والطرق التي من خلالها يتم معالجته في ظل سياسات الإستعمار الإسكانية المجحفة بحق السكان المقدسيين.

## II. Introduction

In an interview with Sarah Kaminker, former municipal counselor and city planner, discussing the Israeli zoning and urban planning policies that restrict Palestinian housing development in Jerusalem, she said, “in the future there will be no place for Arabs to build in Jerusalem; they will need to leave Jerusalem and move to the West Bank” (Dumper, 1997). Israel is seeking to outnumber the Jewish population and minimize the Palestinian population in Jerusalem municipality for the later to reach less than 20% of the total population by 2020 (Aweideh, 2010). Minimizing the Palestinian population in Jerusalem is being implemented through a number of systematic measures, such as mass population transfer, mobility restrictions, residency revocation, forced evictions, home demolition, land confiscation, property expropriation, scarce municipal infrastructure investments, and lack of services, limited housing permits and restrictions on construction density (42 Years of Occupation, 2009).

These measures aim to reduce the public space available for construction and limit the domestic living space to create overcrowded neighborhoods and dense households; in other words people get to live as a canned sardine. The public and private space of the Palestinian Jerusalemites is being invaded by these colonial policies which aim at weakening their existence in the city. Each and every Jerusalemite suffers from Israel ruthless practices, regardless of their age, sex, religion, and class. However, these practices don't have identical impact on different social groups due to various reasons including, gender relations, division of roles, access to social and economic resources, access to civil society support,

social norms and perceptions, location of residence and the degree to which it is targeted by Israeli forces and the type of political goals Israel wants to achieve in a specific location and the forms and types of resistance and activism adopted by these different social groups (Aweideh, 2010).

Jerusalemite women have a harsh experience in facing violence and humiliation from the Israeli colonial rule. They usually operate with few options due to the colonization, which hinders them from elevating their quality of life and being integrated in the public space and achieving self-determination. We must address and recognize these colonial forms of oppression in order to understand women's everyday life, their acts, interactions, negotiations and the meanings they give to these practices and how every woman perceives her life reality subjectively.



### III. Colonized Jerusalem Today

Jerusalem has always been at the center of Israeli settler-colonial enterprise. In the 1948 Nakba, Jerusalem was divided into East and West Jerusalem. The eastern side was under the Jordanian rule and the western side was occupied by Israel forcing the residents of that area to leave their homes (Dumper, 1997). During the six day war in 1967, the Old City, East Jerusalem and adjacent parts of the West Bank were captured by the Israeli forces and annexed into Israel and this annexation was politically asserted by a new law entitled “Basic law: Jerusalem” was passed on 1980 declaring that “complete and united Jerusalem is the capital of Israel” (Dumper, 1997). Since then, Israel imposes its discriminatory policies and regulations and military incursions to have a geographical and demographic superiority in Jerusalem city.

Data published by Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics (PCBS) in 2012 showed that 397 thousand is approximately the total Palestinian population of Jerusalem Governorate, 50.9% are male and 49.1% are female, representing 9.2% of the Palestinian Territories’ total population, which is approximately 4.3 million (PCBS, 2012).

According to PCBS (2012) and for statistical purposes, Jerusalem Governorate is split into two sections. The first section is East Jerusalem District “J1”, which was annexed by Israel in 1967 and under total political and administrative control of Israel. The second section is Jerusalem J2, which is the remaining area of Jerusalem district and it is under Palestinian administration. 246 thousand lives in J1 and 151 thousand in J2 (PCBS, 2012).

According to the administrative divisions of the population, construction and residential units, there are 44 communities in Jerusalem Governorate (PCBS, 2011). The statistical data collected in 2010 indicates that the percentage of individuals below 15 years old is 38.6%, while the percentage of individuals who are 60 years old and over is only 5.7% (PCBS, 2011). Hence, the Palestinian community in Jerusalem Governorate is young.

On the other hand, 267,325 is the total number of settlers in Jerusalem Governorate residing in 26 settlements; 201,273 settlers in J1 residing in 16 settlements, and 66,052 settlers in J2 residing in 10 settlements. Therefore, for every 10 Palestinians living in Jerusalem Governorate, there are 7 settlers dwelling in settlements built on the Governorate lands (PCBS, 2011).

Israel created a number of checkpoints and built the Expansion and Annexation Wall to separate people living in J1 from their families in J2 and the West Bank. The impact of the Expansion and Annexation Wall over Jerusalem governorate and the people's lives can be measured through the following indicators collected in 2008: 2,940 households were displaced, 21,600 persons were displaced, and 9,104 dunums is the area of confiscated land which the wall was built on and 77,876 dunums the area of isolated lands inside the wall (PCBS, 2011).

This study went beyond the numbers of demolished and evicted houses, figures of revoked residency rights, percentages of allowed construction density. The study examined the reality of everyday life in colonized, vulnerable and highly restricted domestic and public spheres. It explored the meanings and

understandings Jerusalemites give to their practices, experiences and challenges on various dimensions, including legal and political housing challenges, psychological and physical health, restricted and inconvenient household space, family and community conflict and cooperation dynamics, support networks, and survival and resistance strategies.

#### **IV. Conceptual Framework**

##### **- Colonized Places and Spaces**

The unjust and violent appropriation of land and the struggle over resources and land ownership is a key element of Israeli colonialism. Such actions don't occur in isolation, it has an unavoidable impact on spatial relations (Mills, 2005). The perceived spatial restrictions reinforce the dominance of Israeli colonialism at various scales of the private domestic space, public national space and its institutions, reaching the international sphere.

The colonial power controls the colonized space and also places its own meaning over it. For example, the indigenous people of Australia used fire to clean up the forests, avoid snakes and make it easier to walk through the land and perform hunting activities. The first British settlers and explorers viewed these burnt grasslands as a wasteland without taking into consideration that the indigenous Australians used the land to plant food crops and farm animals in a different way than the white Europeans. The British colonizers perceived Australia as an empty, unexploited land imposing their own sense of place and space (Mills, 2005).

Israel also imposes its own sense of space over the Palestinian expropriated lands, so it controlled the space first by expropriating land and imposing meanings that serve its control. By 1967, most of the available land in West Jerusalem was used by Israel municipality; therefore, the available space in the annexed East Jerusalem and adjacent areas of the West Bank was viewed as a crucial town planning dimension and the main drive behind the Israeli settlement policies

(Dumper, 1997). Israel uses the confiscated lands as a means to stabilize its dominance over the occupied Palestinian nation. For Palestinians, the land is a generous mother providing uncountable graces; it is a symbol of existences and rootedness. When Israel appropriates their lands, destroys their houses, burns their food crops, cuts off their olive trees, Israel violates the meanings, values and connections the Palestinians established with their lands and more or at least equally important it deprives Palestinians from their means of production and turns them from farmers to workers.

A report entitled “Occupation, Colonialism, Apartheid: A re-assessment of Israel's practices in the occupied Palestinian territories under international law”, published by the Human Sciences Research Council of South Africa (2009), highlighted five main elements that manifest the colonial character of the Israel’s rule in the Occupied Palestinian Territories (OPT), which are, breaching the territorial integrity of OPT; depriving the Palestinian population from the ability for self-governance; integrating the economy of OPT into that of Israel; violating the notion of sovereignty over natural resources; and denying the Palestinians the right to freely express, develop and practice their culture.

The character of the Israeli colonial regime differs from the character of the European colonial regime. Fayez Sayegh (1965) discussed three main features that differentiate the Israeli colonialism in Palestine from the European colonialism in Asia and Africa. First, the European settlers were either driven by economic motives to make fortune by exploiting the colonized territories’ natural resources, or by political imperialist motives to prepare the ground for the

annexation of certain territories to their governments, while the Zionist settlers were driven by the desire to attain nationhood and establish an independent Jewish state attracting Jews of the world to its territories. Second, the European colonialism tolerate the existence of the indigenous population, whom they would dominate, exploit and require their services, while the Zionist colonialism and aspirations of statehood were incompatible with the existence of the native population. Third, European colonizers could overcome the barriers obstructing their settlement in the coveted territories by counting on the protection from their imperial sponsors; on the other hand, the Zionist colonizers couldn't count on similar facilities. In addition, Sayegh (1965) marked three aspects that formulate the character of the colonial settler state, which are racism, violence and terrorism, and territorial expansion.

Furthermore, Joseph Massad has described the Israeli Zionist project as a colonial enterprise established on the practice of apartheid and the maintenance of illegitimate and racist laws that discriminate against Palestinians, guarantee legal rights and privileges to its Jewish citizens, and ensure the Jewish demographic and geographic supremacy and therefore, maintain the Jewish character of the state (Massad, 2007).

The Israeli colonial governance in Jerusalem out of other Palestinian cities is heavily focusing on the Jewish demographical and geographical hegemony in the city seen as the complete and united Jewish capital of Israel. The Israeli colonial governance in Jerusalem has a unique character with the pervasive existence of Israeli police, the raise of settler terrorism, the administrative and

political control of Israeli authority and its institutions over Jerusalemites everyday life, the constant observation and surveillance, the Palestinian leadership vacuum in Jerusalem and the inability of the Palestinian authorities to operate in the city, the lack of security in Jerusalem neighborhoods, and the lack of housing services available to the Palestinian residents of the city. All these aspects distinguish the Israeli colonial governance in Jerusalem from many other Palestinian cities and are discussed in the data analysis part of the research.

The Israeli colonial government imposes racist land and real estate laws to reinforce its control over Jerusalem and legitimize the confiscation and destruction of Palestinian's properties. For instance, The Construction and Building Law (1965) which allows the state to demolish a house or parts of it if built without a permit, and also, The Law of Absentee Property (1950), which allows the property considered 'abandoned' following the violence, forced displacement and destruction of villages in 1948 to the state of Israel (BADIL Resource Center for Palestinian Residency and Refugee Rights, 2012).

Israel exercises full security, civilian and planning control over Palestinians living in East Jerusalem. The Civic Coalition for Defending the Palestinians' Rights in Jerusalem (2008) declared that Israel has appropriated 34% of Jerusalem lands to build more settlements and residential units for Israelis and classified 54% of the land as Green or Open Landscape Area, which is prohibited to build on, having only 12% of Jerusalem lands for Palestinians to build on, 6% of this land is owned by "absentees" and may therefore be confiscated under the Law of Absentee Property. It is worth mentioning that most of the remaining space is

already exhausted with constructions leading to a severe shortage in the available housing space. These colonial practices reveal Israel's desire to reshape the Palestinian public space and to maintain mastery over it (Klein, 2008).

These policies resulted in a shortage of housing units for Jerusalem residents in mid-2011, the Population Density in Jerusalem governorate reached 1,128 inhabitants/km<sup>2</sup> compared with 546 inhabitants/km<sup>2</sup> in the West Bank (PCBS, 2012). For instance, 36,000 Palestinian are dwelling in the Muslim Quarter of the Old City, whose poor infrastructure can only support 17,000 residents (Klein, 2008). During the period 1977-1983, around 90% of all new housing construction was for Jews and only 9.9% for Palestinians (Dumper, 1997).

Israel confiscates Jerusalemites' lands, demolishes their houses, destroys their historical landscapes and changes the names of their streets and neighborhoods. Even the dead are not protected from Israeli obnoxious colonial practices. In 2011, Israeli bulldozers destroyed Ma'man Allah ancient Muslim cemetery disinterring human remains in a disrespectful manner in order to build "Museum of Tolerance" with zero tolerance towards Muslim dead. Through these spatial policies, Israel attempts to Judaize Jerusalem city by changing its demographic, geographic, and social features. Israel dominates the Jerusalemite residents' lives and abuses their housing and residency rights, taking into account the constant panoramic observation to the inhabitants' everyday life using surveillance cameras especially in the Old City of Jerusalem.



### - **Women Politicized Space**

Colonialism's spatial practices play a significant role in the constitution of particular subject positions for those within the colonized public and private space (Mills, 2005). Israel uses disciplinary approach to domesticate the individual Palestinian body to conform to its political order. Colonial subjectivity is strongly associated with the forms of spatiality and movement/restriction developed in the colonial context (Mills, 2005). Such spatial boundaries and restrictions, which are created by colonial forces not only to restrict but also to produce and shape the lives of Palestinians, are reflected in and represented by the Palestinian household unit itself. In other words, the domestic space embodies the politicized space.

What separate the living private space from the politicized space are only physical walls and boundaries; "political relations of power and resistance operate at all scales and certainly not just in the public sphere" (Duncan, 1996). Colonization touches many elements of women's lives, including security, stability, wellbeing, education, employment and family, breaching international humanitarian law with complete impunity and without being held accountable for their criminal activities (Rought-Brooks, Duaibis, and Hussein, 2010).

Amani, a woman from East Jerusalem, had to live with her parents-in-law after her house was demolished, she reported, "I have no privacy or time or space to myself at all." She didn't only lose her house but her privacy, independence and the peaceful normal family life (Rought-Brooks, Duaibis, and Hussein, 2010). How can Jerusalemite women raise their children when the threat of Israeli

bulldozers prevents any sense of normal peaceful life? This would, of course, have enormous social ramifications, at every level.

Women in colonized societies and conflict zones are at high risk of experiencing violence. Women's bodies happen to be a site for pervasive insecurity, public invasion and political militarization. Their bodies function as a representation of the "body politic" indicating the regulation, surveillance and domination of bodies (Scheper Hughes and Locke, 1987). These women's bodies and minds became highly politicized embodying conflict, social disorders and the lack of justice. The public immobility, insecurity and displacement are translated into women daily discourse.

"When the sense of social order is threatened...the symbols of self-control become intensified along with those of social control; boundaries between individual and political bodies become blurred"(Scheper-Hughes and Lock, 1987). Palestinian Jerusalemites' sense of social order is being put in jeopardy and their national identity is being threatened by the isolation of East Jerusalem from the rest of the Occupied Palestinian Territories by multiple checkpoints and by the Annexation and Separation Wall and the access to West Jerusalem and other Israeli settlements.

According to the Israeli National Insurance Institute 78% of the Palestinian population in Jerusalem live below the poverty line, and according to the Jerusalem Institute for Israeli Studies 40% of men and 85% of women above the age of 15 are not engaged in the labor force (Alyan, Sela, and Pomerantz, 2012). These statistics reveal the socioeconomic deterioration and severe poverty

experienced by Jerusalemites, which hinder them from enhancing the quality of their living spaces.

The politicized space in Jerusalem city doesn't facilitate women's inclusion and participation in the public realm. Women's mobility is highly restricted by the unstable political situation and the physical road blocks, which limit their chances to seek employment opportunities in the West Bank. Such mobility restriction doesn't only limit women's opportunities to join the workforce but also to get proper education in the first place. Jerusalemite women holding an Israeli identification card have access to employment in West Jerusalem; they are usually placed in entry level positions such as cleaners, waitresses, and shop assistants. Moreover, the Israeli municipality in Jerusalem doesn't subsidize childcare centers or transportation and this hinders women from joining the workforce because private childcare centers or nurseries and transportation expenses would cost them a good portion of their salaries. It should be taken into consideration that when the economic conditions are low, women usually have to work even if they prefer not to.

In a politically unsecured country, women's attempts to challenge their restricted and regulated reality need tremendous effort, determination and support. The political restrictions on Palestinian women's movement within the colonized zone urge them to find new tactics to adopt themselves and their families in such a harsh context. To understand how women's daily practices and tactics evolve, the socio-economic and political fabrics of the community along with the family's production and reproduction processes should thoroughly be examined.

Jerusalemite women's notion of space doesn't only communicate meanings of confinement and victimization but also meanings of survival and agency challenging dominant discourses. The spatial practices of marginalized groups help to destabilize the public/private spatial distinction (Duncan, 1996). In other words, the clear division of the female-private and male-public spheres is being contested.

Previous studies argue that Palestinian women have the capacity to deal with political upheavals by finding new methods of survival, adaptation and resistance to the deteriorating living situation and that those women are not merely victims or passive subjects but also actors in the colonial structure and agents of change and resistance to the Israeli colonial policies (Nabris, K., Aweidah, S., and Abdo, H. 2007, Shalhoub-Kevorkian, N., and Abdo, N. 2006, and Mg'mas, H., Khalidi, F., and Naser, R.).

When the Israeli government with its racist policies and regulation invades and shatters women and their families' private space, the intra-household family dynamics will inevitably be damaged in such context of deprivation, dislocation, oppression and humiliation. The more the Jerusalemite family is subject to settler-colonial housing policies, the more their private space is jeopardized and the more tension and conflict between family members can occur. By analyzing families' everyday cooperation and conflict dynamics, we can examine any possible tension within Jerusalemite families as to understand how challenging it is to cooperate and endure under such colonial practices.

### - **Household Conflict and Cooperation Dynamics**

The bargaining and conflict approach questions the concepts of altruism and absolute collaboration within family members. This approach takes into account the individual's perceived interest, welfare, contribution and wellbeing, accordingly, the individual decides whether to cooperate or not if the bargaining process proves to be satisfactory or not (Sen, 1990).

This approach is different than the unitary conceptualization of the household, which treats the household as a unit of altruistic decision making with the existence of the benevolent dictator who controls the resources and their allocation between family members. This dictator has the power on the decision making process in the household unit, since this dictator knows best when it comes to the abilities and needs of each family members. The dictator is not necessarily to be a male figure; it can be a prominent and strong woman, who has control over the division of tasks in the domestic sphere (Sen, 1990).

The unitary approach is used in most of the previous studies and researches that discuss Jerusalemite family dynamics under the harsh social, political and economic situation. As a result, cooperation, altruism, and sacrifice to achieve common welfare all are assumed models that shape the familial ties in Jerusalem. This study differs from others that deal with Jerusalemites' struggle under Israeli cruel political measures in that it questions the unitary approach in analyzing the familial interactive dynamics and the social cohesion in the context of the Old City of Jerusalem.

## V. Literature Review

According to Abraham Maslow's hierarchy of needs theory, physiological needs, which include nutrition, housing, and clothing, are placed in the first level of humans' needs hierarchy (Maslow, 1954). Satisfying those needs is very important for humans' survival and existence. We should understand that violence does not merely have to be physical; it falls short in not acknowledging that social inequalities and violation result in slow death by depriving people of basic human need satisfaction (Gwandure, 2009).

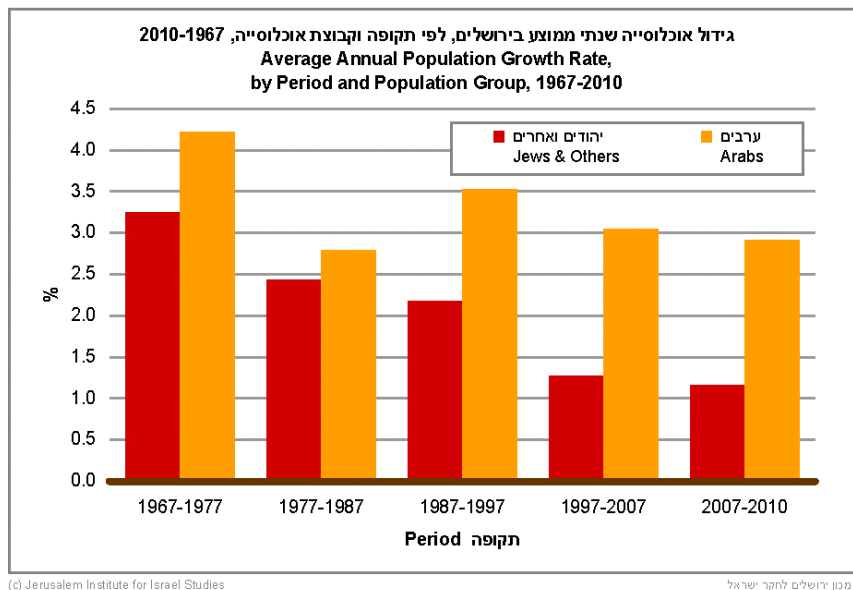
Housing is one of the basic human needs recognized by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Many researches were conducted to investigate the influence of having an adequate housing and living space on the wellbeing of the individuals and their families. A recent study (Gwandure, 2009) observed the psychological functioning of 240 people from Johannesburg, South Africa in relation to their living conditions. The first group consisted of 120 participants from privileged communities with adequate living space. While the second group consisted of 120 participants from communities facing some challenges in having personal privacy and sufficient living space. It was found that there was a significant difference between these two groups in the levels of anxiety, depression, disorders, and addictive and risk behaviors. These results have indicated that participants from communities facing some housing challenges should be given psychological support and decent housing conditions to reduce psychological health risks.

This study (Gwandure, 2009) links the environmental factor with individuals' psychological functioning and can stimulate further research efforts in the subject of housing and individuals' wellbeing in a colonized context, where the fundamental struggle over land and resources is physically represented by housing, residency rights and existence. East Jerusalem is one of the Palestinian communities, where there are many unprivileged inhabitants suffering from poor housing conditions. Since 1967, Israel has imposed its biased policies, laws and regulations on Palestinian residents of Jerusalem to control their everyday life. These laws and regulations invade Jerusalemites' private spaces and places, their intimacy and tranquility. Their homes, which are supposed to be a refuge where they seek comfort and peace, became an unsafe place where the colonial government monitors their physical and psychological functioning.

The Israeli government violates Jerusalemites' individual and collective rights. Jerusalemites' rights of having adequate living standards for themselves and their families are being denied by Israeli government policies amid international silence. More than 75% of the Jerusalemite population lives in small inconvenient houses (Odeh, 2008).

“Given the demographic reality of a 35% Palestinian population in a city envisioned by Israel as a ‘united Jewish capital’, Israel has felt the need to follow policies, which aim to minimize and dominate the Palestinian population of Jerusalem (Tufakji, 2009).” The official estimate of the total number of the population in 2010, at the present municipal area of the “unified” Jerusalem, is 788.1 thousand; 504.2 thousand are Jews and others and 283.9 thousand are Arabs

(Jerusalem institute for Israel Studies, 2012). The population average annual growth between 2007 and 2010 is 2.9% for Arabs and 1.2% for Jews and others (Jerusalem institute for Israel Studies, 2012). Below is a chart that displays the average annual population growth rate from 1967 until 2010:



Palestinians comprise almost the third of the total population of Jerusalem and with this high annual growth for the Palestinian population in comparison to the low annual growth for the Israeli population in Jerusalem, Israel geographic and demographic hegemony in the city and their notion of a “Unified Jewish Capital” is threatened. In their quest to achieve their colonial goals, the Israeli government constantly violates Jerusalemites’ basic rights and in particular their residency rights, since it reflect their physical existence in the city. According to Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics, between 1967 and 2010, The Israeli government confiscated 14,138 Israeli identification cards from Jerusalemites. Moreover, the children registered in the confiscated ID cards also



lost their residency rights in the city; therefore, the number of people whose Jerusalem ID cards were revoked is higher than the above mentioned figure (PCBS, 2011).

The colonial forces use various measures to abuse inhabitants' housing rights such as land confiscation, settlements construction and expansion, homes eviction and demolishing, forced displacement, mobility restrictions and many other brutal measures (42 Years of Occupation, 2009). The number of demolished housing units in Jerusalem Governorate between 1967 and 2010 is 1501 unit destroying the lives of 7413 person; almost 54% of them are children (PCBS, 2011).

All these different colonial measures resulted in a shortage of housing units for Jerusalem residents and therefore created more overcrowded and inadequate households. It is worth mentioning that Jerusalemites find it nearly impossible to attain a building permit due to the complex financial and mentally exhausting procedures imposed by the municipality of Jerusalem. Jerusalemites applying for building license have to wait 5-10 years to acquire the license and at the best case scenario, the issued licenses reach only 5% of the total applications (Odeh, 2008). Even when a Jerusalemite owns a piece of land and obtains a license, Israeli municipality limit the construction density by reducing the allowed area for building on a certain plot minimizing the number and size of constructions. For instance, the allowed area for construction in Al-Mukabber is only 37% of the plot's area, while it reaches 90% in the settlement Armon Hanatzif, which is built on Al-Mukabber lands (Odeh, 2008).

The financially and logistically exhausting process of attaining building permits forced Jerusalemites to build illegally. From 2004 till 2008, about 50 million dollars was the amount of fines collected by the Municipality of Jerusalem from the Palestinian inhabitants in East Jerusalem, who were accused of having or living in illegal and unlicensed constructions (42 Years of Occupation, 2009). A recent study (2012) published by The Association for Civil Rights in Israel stated that Palestinian population comprises 38% of Jerusalem's total population; 78% of these Palestinians and 84% of their children live below poverty line. Jerusalemites suffer from extreme poverty, lack of job opportunities, poor education system, and systematic shortage of physical and economic infrastructure.

The invasion to the privacy of the domestic space affects all family members and mostly women. When Al-Maqdese for Society Development (MSD, 2009) has interviewed Jerusalemite women to tell their stories of demolition, dislocation and eviction, most of these women have expressed their suffering caused by the daily Israeli violations using spatial terms. One of the women said, "My grandchildren complain about the limited space and about the fear of playing in the dangerous area around their home." However, Al-Maqdese didn't go beyond these stories to analyze how the reality of Israeli aggression and colonial housing policies dominate and re-produce their spaces and places, daily lives, survival strategies, and their political identity or how such living circumstances shape family dynamics, interactions and gender relations.

In “Palestinian Women’s Ordeals in East Jerusalem” study, Nadera Shalhoub Kevorkian and Nahla Abdo recommend to focus studying, documenting and disseminating women’s agency, activism, hardships, coping and adaptation methods and success stories around daily survival. Moreover, they recommended to conduct further investigation of the impact of Israeli racist spatial policies and militarization on gender roles, in other words to have a “spatial gender analyses” of specific case studies (Shalhoub and Abdo, 2006).

Women’s Centre for Legal Aid and Counseling (2012) has recently published a study entitled “Women’s Voices: Glimpses of Life under Occupation”. The study describes Israeli violations to Palestinian women’s rights and their daily struggles under this colonial regime through collecting a number of women’s testimonies. The study only lists the various types of Israeli violations and backs it up with women’s testimony without an in-depth analysis to their stories. For example, a woman from East Jerusalem illustrated the suffering of families who experience house demolition, saying: *“women often feel a loss of control over domestic matters and heightened sense of insecurity while men experience increased stress and anxiety. For many children the demolition, along with the disruption to education and increased tension in the home, results in depression, anxiety and symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder.”* This testimony rests only on the word of the speaker alone without unfolding a deeper examination beyond the spoken words to address issues, such as the colonial politics of space in relation to gender relations and how this increased tension in the household may create conflict and have an impact over family dynamics.

Usually most of the studies or researches, which tackle the Israeli infringements to Palestinians' rights, depict romanticized images about the unquestioned collaboration and solidarity of the Palestinian family members in order to resist and stand tall in front of the Israeli colonization. Nahid Al-Sabagh, a mother living in Sheikh Jarrah for more than 22 years said, "Even though we live in an overcrowded and restricted space, we want to stay in Jerusalem" (MSD, 2009). Khadija Al-Sabbagh, who is part of a refugee family displaced a number of times, said that nothing will stop them from staying in Jerusalem even if it costs them their lives (MSD, 2009).

Previous studies and even the media adopt, maintain and promote a romantic discourse in depicting family solidarity in Jerusalem without having a serious investigation to the reality to everyday hardship, the burden placed onto their shoulders, how these families act and react and search for methods of survival and resistance in a highly militarized and securitized context like Jerusalem. It is particularly important to understand the social, familial and household arrangements that emerge in everyday life without claiming or assuming universal or holistic patterns of familial collaboration that applies to all Jerusalemite families subjected to cruel colonial policies that aim at erasing their existence from the city. Therefore, we need to examine the kinds of conflict or tension that arises in the household and the ways through which it is being tackled by analyzing the everyday tactics used to challenge and also cope with the living context.

In this study, we expect that although Jerusalemite families display a strong familial cooperation and resistance against Israeli violations to their basic housing rights, the deprivation of such rights can actually create tension and conflict between family members.

It is needed to have clearer knowledge about the Jerusalemite family dynamics for local and international, governmental and nongovernmental bodies to be able to provide aid and assistance to these families, who are struggling to protect their principles of belonging and national identity in an extremely contested area like Jerusalem.

Moreover, this study analyzes the agency in Jerusalemite women's actions of everyday resistance and examines women's tactics that offer hope of emancipation from the overbearing situation in their communities and challenge gender roles and division of labour. These tactics, which are 'the arts of the weak', challenge the strategies of the powerful and create a space of and for these women and their families (De Certeau, 1984).

Such spatial boundaries and restrictions created by colonial forces do not only restrict the lives of the Jerusalemite residents but also produce it and shape it. Therefore, the threats and reality of segregation, displacement, humiliation, and violation are translated into specific domestic arrangements forming the Jerusalemite families' dynamics and functions. This study investigates the impact of having unsecured, politicized and inadequate living space over family cooperation and conflict dynamics. It also focuses on the impact of colonial housing policies on the private sphere and how women, who spend much of their

time in this private sphere, use different tactics in avoiding conflict, creating peace in the household, and maintaining the family's existence in Jerusalem. Through studying conflict, we will understand the challenges these families face to survive and collaborate together in such a harsh living conditions.

## VI. Methodology

The study used a qualitative methodological approach for data collection and analyses. This was implemented by using semi-structured interviews and focus groups in order to obtain in depth information and understand this local community. The process of developing and discussing the findings was based on examining three sets of data:

- One focus group with 6 Palestinian mothers from the Old City of Jerusalem.

The focus group with mothers, who have experienced some housing challenges and suffered from inappropriate living conditions, encouraged them to participate in sharing their experiences, feelings, and thoughts about their housing upheavals. The brainstorming and discussion between these women enabled them to compare and contrast between their living conditions and survival strategies. This active engagement expanded the levels of discussion and analyses in identifying women's ordeals in finding adequate living space for themselves and their families. The focus group examined the quality of life for these Jerusalemite women suffering from limited access to land and housing services. The Community Action Center in the Old City of Jerusalem provided a venue where we conducted this focus group in a way that is suitable, safe and comfortable for those women. The 6 women, who participated in the focus group, also invited me to their houses to conduct an in-depth interview with each one of them.

- 14 live in-depth interviews with mothers coming from 10 different Palestinian Families dwelling in the Old City of Jerusalem, as mentioned earlier the 6

women who participated in the focus group also participated in the one-to-one interviews. Conducting the interviews in these women's own houses was very important because they felt comfortable and safe while narrating their life experiences. Also, since women spend much of their time in the household, this material context evoked more images and words to their minds. I also examined this material context to have a comprehensive picture for their living settings and conditions and the meanings that these women themselves provide to their experiences. The aim of these interviews was to record and track details of housing hardships and the everydayness of suffering, conflict, cooperation, and resistance. This study did not only record and display women's narratives but it gave a profound meaning to their stories by analyzing it in view of the physical setting of their houses and neighborhoods, how this setting is being shaped by the Israeli settler-colonial housing policies, and how each story reveals specific housing hardships.

Their responses were collected on voluntarily basis focusing on their life experiences and challenges, access to resources and support, roles and responsibilities, perceived needs, value and contribution, their everyday tactics and practices and the meanings they give to these practices which as important as the action itself, and their agency.

The notion of everyday tactics which was developed by Michel de Certeau in *The Practice of Everyday Life* (1984) reflects the actions of the 'other', the 'arts of the weak, opposing a certain structure or strategic power. Such tactics are used by the weak to seize opportunities, manipulate events, and create a space that



offers redemption from the uncertainty and complexity of the overbearing reality; “A tactic insinuates itself into the other’s place fragmentarily, without taking it over in its entirety, without being able to keep it at a distance. It has at its disposal no base where it can capitalize on advantages, prepare its expansions, and secure independence with respect to circumstances ... it is always on the watch for opportunities that must be seized “on the wing.” Whatever it wins, it does not keep. It must constantly manipulate events in order to turn them into “opportunities.” The weak must continually turn to their own ends forces alien to them” (De Certeau, 1984).

This approach serves the purpose of this study in analyzing women’s actions within the colonized space and understanding whether these actions are determined by the strategic power, the Israeli colonialism, beyond the control or consciousness of these women or whether women have some degree of ability to shape their reality. This study is looking forward to having an interpretation on how women and their families react to the invasion and destruction of their living space by the colonial power and how do these seize opportunities and turn it to their own ends and benefits.

All interviews were conducted in Arabic and translated to English by the author. Most of the interviews were recorded and then the audio files were converted into written transcript with accompanied notes gathered from the actual interview. Few women refused to have their interviews recorded due to some privacy and safety concerns. The general background information for the 14 interviewed women is as follows:

- Um Zoher is 63 years old and she has 4 children. Her husband died a year ago and she lives alone. She volunteers at one of the centers by giving Islamic religion courses.
- Um Saleh is 57 years old, she lives with her husband in Jerusalem and she has 5 children.
- Um Ibrahim is 35 years and she was born in Jerusalem and she lives with her husband, 7 children and mother in law.
- Nadia is in her forties, and has 5 children. She used to live in Jordan with her parents; she got married and moved to Jerusalem.
- Um Hasan is 39 years old, she is originally from Nablus. She has been in Jerusalem for more than twenty years. She lives with her 4 children, husband, and mother in law.
- Sana' is 56 years old, she was born in Jerusalem and she is married and has 4 children.
- Manal is 42 years old, she is originally from Bethlehem, now she is living in Jerusalem with her husband and 7 children.
- Um Adam is 66 years old widow, she has a clothes shop and she provides for her daughters and grandchildren, whose mother is dead and father is imprisoned for life.
- Siham is 42 years old. She was living in Jordan with her ex-husband; she demanded divorce because he was sterile. She got married for the second time and moved to Palestine. She has been living in Jerusalem for only 10 years with her 3 children.

- Fatima is 45 years old; she divorced her husband after 11 years of unhappy marriage. She lives with her mother and 6 children in Jerusalem.
- Um Othman is 63 years old spending all of these years in the Old City of Jerusalem. She is currently living with her husband, children and grandchildren, a total of 16 individuals in a 60 square meter house.
- Reema is 32 years old, she is divorced and she provides for her two children. She lives in Jerusalem at her parents' house.
- Mirvat is 35 years old, she has 6 children and she has recently moved to live with her in laws house after her husband being unable to pay the house rental.
- Rania is 34 years old and she is a working mother of two children. She lives in Jerusalem at her parents' house after getting divorced.

Two men were present during the interviews with their wives and participated in sharing information:

- Abo Othman is Um Othman's husband and he is 63 years old. He has closed his grocery shop and is looking for a job. He is currently having a hard time providing for his family.
- Abo Salah is Sana's husband and he is in his early sixties. He works at Al-Aqsa mosque.
- Two interviews were conducted with employees of local bodies who work with Palestinian families in the Old City of Jerusalem, Rima Rizeq from The Community Action Center and with Khaled Obeidat from The Palestinian Counseling Center. The Community Action Center (CAC), located in the Old City of Jerusalem, is a non-profit organization established in 1999. The

center's main goal is to empower Palestinians in Jerusalem to access their basic rights, and to develop the community's capacity for economic growth and social equity. The Palestinian Counseling Center (PCC) was established in the Old City of Jerusalem in 1983. The Center works with Jerusalemite women to develop their capacities and improve their psychological well-being. Both Community Action Center and Palestinian Counseling Center enriched this study by sharing their wide experience in their fields of work and provide us with more information about their observation, findings and recommendation after many years of working with Jerusalemite women and families.

The Community Action Center connected me to some of the interviewed women by providing their contact information and scheduling meetings with them. The women interviewees were ready to answer my questions and give me personal information about themselves and their families and hosted me in their houses because I was introduced to them by The Community Action Center as a researcher and a Jerusalemite woman trying to understand and put a shed light on their unique life experiences and challenges and that my study will be submitted as a partial fulfillment to the requirements for the Master's Degree in Gender and Development Studies from the Faculty of Graduate Studies at Birzeit University, Palestine. These interviewed women are engaged in the center for pretty long time, they participate in different trainings and courses implemented by this center and other community centers in the Old City. They told me they trust the center and their staff and the center respects their privacy and would never use their

personal information to put them in a risky situation, so my credibility as a researcher was from the credibility of the center.

The fact that I live and work in Jerusalem and have connections with a number of Jerusalemite organizations, individuals, women and families, has facilitated my field work. Therefore, I was able to reach some of the interviewed women through using my personal connections. It's worth pointing out that the Jerusalemite community is highly and strongly connected, individuals are molded in different levels of interwoven webs of kinship relations. Due to the political situation, including closures and residency status, individuals coming from different Palestinian cities can't live or even enter Jerusalem, and Jerusalemites can't live outside the city as to not to get their Jerusalem identification card revoked. Therefore, familial connectivity is significant in the Jerusalemite community; people know each other, from where they come from, their ancestors, how they are related to each other, etc. I was identified by many of the interviewed women through my kin relationships, they asked me where I come from and to whom I'm related, and this in return created a kind of familiarity and a comfortable environment to communicate and share information.

The interviews and focus groups with Jerusalemite women tackled the following issues:

- **Background information:** Personal information including age, marital status, number of children, education, employment status, economic conditions, etc.
- **Political and legal housing challenges:** To what degree is the household targeted by Israeli colonial policies and/or threatened by nearby settlers? Is

their construction authorized by the municipality? To what degree the family is able to pay the housing taxes?

- **Housing conditions:** Property ownership, size of the household, number of family members living together, nuclear or extended family living under the same roof, hygiene, safety, privacy, any required adaptation for the house, etc.
- **Health conditions:** this section examines the possible physical illnesses, such as bone disease, asthma, vitamin deficiencies, and the psychological disorders, such as distress, fear, depression, anxiety, that is being developed due to the inadequate living conditions and unsecured spaces.
- **Household arrangements:** who does what type of work in the house and receive what benefits? What are women's functions and capabilities within the private sphere? What is their perception about their contribution in the family setting and what are their demands? Or what are the expected returns that arise from their contribution? How do they perceive their individual interests and well being in relation to the overall family well being? What are the different forms of cooperation and conflict that arise in the household and how these forms are being perceived?
- **Life Tactics:** This section investigates the life tactics women use to deal with and overcome everyday life pressures and challenges and how these tactics respond to specific hardships in their living context.
- **Support networks:** this section maps the kind of formal or/and informal support networks available for these women in times of housing hardships.

These networks might include relatives, neighbors, governmental institutions, civil society and international organizations.

One of the challenges faced during conducting the interviews and focus group was to find the suitable time for these women who have family commitments and are always busy with the daily activities and the domestic duties they have to accomplish. Another challenge is the lack of privacy during some of the interviews, therefore, when the interviewed women were surrounded by family members and neighbors; they felt reluctant in sharing some information.

I did a primarily pilot study with three Jerusalemite women suffering from residency hardships and over crowdedness and this current study is an extension on the theoretical and methodological levels opening more dimensions for dialogue, discussion and analyses.

Interviewing women from only the Old City of Jerusalem allowed me to explore the ways in which families and women in this community have similar and different ways in recognizing their living space, dealing with the residency hardships facing these people in their everyday life and creating modes of coping and struggling. It also allowed me to investigate the formal and informal social support networks available for these women and families to understand their survival techniques and resistance strategies.

The subject matter of this study is a sensitive one specially the section that discusses the families conflict and cooperation dynamics. People don't usually feel comfortable when disclosing their internal family issues to the public, therefore, confidentiality is critical in this study and that's why I did not reveal the

interviewees personal data or any major identifying details or characteristics such as individuals' names, locations and so on. Moreover, in a context that is militarized and under constant surveillance like the Old City of Jerusalem, any information that may put the interviewees and their families in danger and any data the interviews are reluctant about was not being shared. The intension of this study is not to embarrass the interviewees and expose their private issues or put their safety at risk, on the contrary, this study aims at understanding and respecting their acts of endurance and challenge to their unsecure and poor living spaces.

As Edward Said explains “the real issue is whether indeed there can be a true representation of anything, or whether any and all representations, because they are representations, are embedded first in the language and then in the culture, institutions, and political ambience of the represented.” However, in this study, the researcher is not attempting to represent these women and the details of their everyday life or to speak on their behalf. On the contrary, these women are the ones who are narrating their life stories, describing their reality, giving specific meanings to their living conditions, reflecting on their thoughts, feelings, suffering, struggle and actions.



## **VII. Data Analysis**

### **1. Political and Legal Housing Challenges**

This section discusses the political and legal housing challenges Jerusalemite families face. This includes issues related to housing authorization, taxes and construction fines, closures and mobility restrictions, residency status, security surveillance and the rise of settler terrorism. The interviewed women showed how much they are well informed about housing taxes and fines they pay to the Israeli municipality, and the degree to which their house is targeted by the colonial Israeli government and threatened by adjacent Jewish orthodox settlers.

#### **- Housing Authorization**

Palestinians living in the Old City of Jerusalem find it nearly impossible to attain a building or renovation permits from the Israeli authorities. This forced many families to build without permits hoping that the authorities will be oblivious on their construction activities. When the authorities find about their unauthorized construction, they send penalty notices to these families to pay certain amount of money and sometimes they send them demolition orders.

Abo Othman and Um Othman had a grocery store, they closed it because it wasn't bringing much money and they thought that their son and his family can use this available space to live in it. They said, "The Jerusalem Society for Welfare and Development supported us and started to implement the construction project, the Israel Antiquities Authority came and stopped us, we had to pay 20 thousand Shekel fines to proceed with the construction. After we solved

this issue with the Israel Antiquities Authority, Jerusalem Society for Welfare and Development told us that they don't have the funding anymore, and that we have to wait for next year. We don't know how to live now, the construction is on hold, we can't benefit from the available space, it is not a grocery nor an apartment, it is nothing, and now rats are hiding under the construction equipment covered with dust.”

Sana' was living with her husband and 4 children in her in laws house. Her brother in law with his wife and 4 children came to live with them. Sana' found the situation unbearable with this number of people living together in a limited space; therefore, they decided to build an extension to the house. She explained, “In 2000, my husband and I decided to quickly build a small apartment on the roof top during Pesach, The Jewish Holiday of Passover, so that the municipality wouldn't see us. Of course, the municipality discovered what we did and came to examine and take photos to the construction.” Abo Salah, Sana's husband, added, “If you want to add one square meter to extend your house, you will find the municipality coming right after you. Until today, we paid 88 shekels fines and taxes to the Israeli authorities and we received an Israeli court decision ordering the demolition of our house. We are going to the court next month, may God have mercy on us.”

Nadia received similar penalty orders from the Israeli authorities because they reconstructed their house, she explained, “my house was approximately 70 square meter house, we did some renovation to extend the size of the house, the Israeli authorities forced us to pay 70 thousand shekels as taxes and penalty.

Today, if we put one brick, they will put us all in prison.” These families don’t only face financial barriers in paying the construction fines but also some administrative barriers. Nadia explained, “We faced many difficulties when going to courts, specially understanding their language, when the municipality came to examine the house, they were talking to me in Hebrew, and I didn’t understand and couldn’t deal with them.”

Um Hasan’s sister received a demolition order and had to destroy their small apartment, Um Hasan narrated, “My sister, her husband and her 5 children used to live in a 20 square meter house built on the rooftop area of my house. I didn’t know how they were living in such a small house. The authorities forced them to destroy it because it was built without authorization from the municipality. They ordered my sister’s family to bring and pay for a bulldozer, destroy the house themselves and clean the area in less than two hours.”

The Welfare Association is renovating some houses in Fatima’s neighborhood. Fatima elaborated on the challenges her neighbors are facing, “My unfortunate neighbors started to renovate their house and the Israel Antiquities Authority stopped them, now they are unable to live in the house because the construction is on hold, they had to go and rent a house until this issue is resolved. The municipality is killing people here, my brother built a room on the roof, they forced him to demolish it by his own hands and also pay fines.”

Whether these families renovate their houses by themselves or by the support of local institutions, the Israeli authorities obstruct their way. The municipality of Jerusalem and the Israel Antiquities Authority are part of the

colonial institutions and mechanisms used to curtail and control people's living spaces. All of these penalty measures are used by the colonial government to suck the financial and physical capacity out of Jerusalemite residents and render them helpless with no options to live a decent life. After paying these fines and getting humiliated in the courts, either the family itself or their relatives and friends, they wouldn't dare to take the risk and place one brick to repair their houses to meet the increasing family need to household space.

Jerusalemite families should be provided by systematic and continuous assistance from legal, human rights and development organizations, when facing demolishing orders, penalty charges, court summons, municipal taxes, and other authorization and construction housing challenges. Moreover, they should also have a prominent leader in their community whom they can address in such housing crises.

#### **- Mobility Restrictions: Closures and Residency Status**

The interviewed women suffer from restricted domestic and public spaces. Checkpoints, road blocks, the Annexation and Separation Wall, and their legal residency status limit their movement and activities in the occupied public sphere.

Siham was living with her family in Jordan; she got married and moved to Palestine to live with her husband. She lived in the West Bank for couple of years then moved to Jerusalem, she has been living in the Old City for 13 years. She illustrated, "we were living in the West Bank in a beautiful house, we were very happy, after Qalandia checkpoint was first established in 2000 separating

Jerusalem from the rest of the West Bank, we moved to this old disgusting house in Jerusalem. I have lived in Jerusalem for more than 13 years now and still don't have the Jerusalem blue identification card, or even temporary residency permission. I have the West Bank identification card; my husband has the Jerusalem identification card because he is originally from Jerusalem. I can't apply for family unification because my husband has another wife and I'm the second one, and according to the Israeli law second marriage is null and void."

Siham has a restricted mobility and can't move freely even within the Jerusalem Municipality Borders. She said, "Once I was going to visit my sister, I took the bus, few minutes later, a soldier stopped the bus to check the ID cards; she asked me 'where is your permission?' I told her that I had the permission but I lost it. She asked me to get down from the bus, I stayed from 8am till 12pm in the street with my little child and it was raining like crazy. I can't leave the Old City, sometimes I can't reach the Damascus gate, if there were soldiers checking the ID cards. My children used to be at Al-Aqsa school, I had to change their school because soldiers sometimes check the ID cards of the people entering the mosque and I couldn't go visit them in their school. My children feel bored most of the time, they beg me to take them to a park to play but I can't take them anywhere."

Siham is a professional hairstylist, she keeps thinking about different ways to find work and depend on herself but her residency status obstructs her efforts. She illustrated, "I used to go to women's houses and style their hair, I used to make lots of money but after the checkpoints and the Wall, my movement was restricted. I can easily find a job with the skills I have but how can I work in

Jerusalem while I have a West Bank ID card? I can't move or breathe in Jerusalem.”

Manal faces similar mobility restrictions because she is originally from Bethlehem and also has a West Bank ID card. She is living in the Old City with her husband and children by having residency permission that should be renewed every certain period of time. She said, “My house is very small and inappropriate for us, I wanted to rent a house in the West Bank but I can't because I have applied for family reunification to get the Jerusalem ID card and I have to prove my presence in Jerusalem, I have been waiting for the family reunification approval for 15 years now, I have an interview in the ministry of interior next month, I hope it will work out. Once I moved to live in Ramallah, the authorities knew about this and revoked my temporary residency permission and couldn't reach my family in Jerusalem for long time. And another time my permission was expired and my son was in the hospital, I couldn't get out of my house to visit him.” Manal used to do embroidery work to generate income; she had hard time carrying her products to sell them in exhibitions in the West Bank, she said, “It was very difficult for me to pass the checkpoints with my embroidery products to sell them in different Palestinian cities, and the transportation expenses I had to pay to move these products from one place to another were very expensive.”

Mirvat and her husband find the house rental in Jerusalem very expensive and they can't afford it, they thought about renting a house in Ramallah since it is cheaper but many concerns hindered them from doing so. Mirvat explained, “We were afraid to get our Jerusalem ID cards revoked and lose the health insurance if

the Israeli authorities found out we moved to Ramallah. Second, the road blocks and the Wall between the West Bank and Jerusalem make it difficult for us to move and I have a sick child and so the medical centers would be far away from our reach. Therefore, I have no alternative but to live with my in laws in this limited space until God helps us.”

Rania works in Ramallah and spends a lot of time waiting on checkpoints, which can be dangerous sometimes with the frequent clashes and confrontations between the soldiers and the Palestinian boys at Qalandia checkpoint. Rania stated, “The soldiers use tear gas and rubber bullets and the boys throw stones on them, so there is a high possibility to get hit by a stone or a bullet or to inhale toxic gas. I used to put my children in a kindergarten in Ramallah near my work but now I moved them to another in Jerusalem because I can’t put them in this danger. I have been working in one of the Palestinian ministries in Ramallah since the nineties; the situation back then was not as terrible as today, movement was much easier between Ramallah and Jerusalem. Also, here in Jerusalem, you can’t find a job that provides you with stability and security; most of the jobs are short term contracts and the applicants must know Hebrew. I have no alternative but to cope with this situation.”

Sana’s family members live in different parts of the West Bank, she described the humiliation and the stress she undergoes whenever she crosses the checkpoints to visit her relatives, “it is becoming very difficult with the Wall and checkpoints, you have to wait for long hours in a narrow passageway, then you go through a metal detector, you might have to take off your shoes sometimes, they

search your bag and check your ID card, it is a total humiliation! You reach Jordan before you reach the West Bank. Yesterday I got back from Hebron at 8pm; it took us two hours from there to Jerusalem because these checkpoints create traffic jam.”

Moreover, Sana’ explained how the road blocks is one reason behind these overcrowded houses in Jerusalem, “every family used to have their own private house but because of the checkpoints and the Wall, all these families left their houses in the West Bank and moved to Jerusalem trying to find a small space to live in, this resulted in overcrowded dwellings and dense neighborhoods, which in return caused many problems for everyone.”

Such colonial and spatial mechanisms of control shape women’s everyday practices on two different levels of fulfilling their domestic duties within the private sphere and being integrated in the productive sphere. These mobility restriction measures hold off options and opportunities for socializing and networking, securing better housing conditions, searching, applying and finding a job or providing any source of income.

#### - **Securitized Space: Intense Surveillance and The Rise of Settler Terrorism**

The Old City of Jerusalem is a highly militarized and securitized zone, where Palestinian families live with feelings of terror and fear. The interviewed women described numerous traumatizing and horrifying incidents from their everyday reality.



Siham believes that the Old City is not safe for her and her children. She fears settlers' terrorism feels vulnerable, she mentioned, "Many time the settlers came attacking my house, once they were running after my little child, I closed the door and let my child enter the house from the window, they came shouting looking for him, they were so angry, they wanted to hit him. Once in Ramadan around sunset and Iftar (fast breaking) time, ultra-Orthodox Jewish settlers caught my son, there were no body in the street to help him, they hit him hard with sticks, they smashed his face, and he went to the hospital that day. My poor son, he was only 9 years old, can you believe this terror and oppression!"

Sana' is also concerned about her children to get harassed by the nearby settlers, she said, "I always ask my sons not to get back late from work because it is dangerous to walk in the Old City late at night and there might be settlers harassing him. I also tell my daughter if she came back from the university and find out that there is any kind of tension or clashes in the Old City to go to her grandmother's house and I will pick her up later when the situation calms down." Um Hasan mentioned similar concerns, "no one leaves the house on Friday after sunset because the settlers come to this nearby synagogue to pray. I remember once I was holding many stuff walking to my house and suddenly I saw a group of settlers in front of me, they obstructed my way, I was very afraid that they will assault, hurt me or pull my head cover, I was shivering all the way until I reached my house."

Om Othman spoke about an incident that frightened her, an incident that she can't forget, she said, "One day before my son's wedding, the Israeli police

attacked the neighborhood at three in the morning, the boys in the neighborhood started throwing stones on the police, who were looking for a man suspect. Suddenly, the police came to my house, broke the door and took my son, I shouted, 'my son's wedding is tomorrow, can't we celebrate and enjoy one happy day in this city,' I felt my heart stopped that day." Om Othman recalled another event, " Once a group of settlers entered our grocery store and hit my son, the police came and put my son in prison for a couple of days and before releasing him they forced him to sign and agree that he wouldn't come near any settler in the Old City. My son didn't do anything, they provoked him. This is unfair; we can't handle this oppression anymore."

Um Hasan recounted another story reflecting on the highly contested and militarized area they are living in, "Four months ago, the Israeli soldiers invaded Al-Aqsa mosque, I was looking at the confrontation and fight between the Palestinian Jerusalemites and the soldiers from my window, I saw around 15 soldiers throwing a young man on the ground beating him to death, I shouted, 'this is my boy, he is just 16 years old, leave him alone,' I went downstairs, my husband and brother in law were also beaten, I wanted to go protect my son, the soldiers came and put the pepper spray on my face, I fainted and passed out. I was on sleeping pills the whole week after this incident; my son and my husband were taken to the hospital. I still can't believe that my son is alive after they hit him with the metal sticks smashing his face and body. Sometimes I see pictures of my beaten son flashing in my mind, the terror I felt that day was terrible."

Manal experienced such feelings of terror, she narrated, “There were some clashes with the soldiers in our neighborhood, the soldiers threw tear gas bomb inside my house. I was outside, when I reached the house, my children were fainted, and they vomited on the mattress, and couldn’t leave the house.”

Police officers are settled next to Um Hasan’s house, she explained, “Police officers came to guard this area, they were sitting under my bedroom’s window, I couldn’t sleep, I wanted to tell them to go do their night watch some other place but I don’t know Hebrew.” She added, “My son is a nervous and angry boy, when he shouts, the police comes to our house assuming that we are beating him, they don’t go until they examine all family members. That’s why I don’t feel comfortable leaving the house for long time, I have to be in the house in case anything happens. These kinds of incidents stress me out.” According to Um Hasan’s story, the Israeli colonial forces use the terms of “protection” and maintaining security to actually invade people’s space and violate their privacy.

Um Hasan, Sana’ and Nadia talked about how their life is being watched by surveillance cameras that surround their neighborhoods. Um Hasan said, “Their security cameras records and captures every single detail, even the small ant, the only thing left now is for them to put cameras in our bedrooms. Sana’ stated, “Surveillance cameras are all around my house, my family and I’m being observed 24 hours a day, if you go to the toilet, they will know. If we unintentionally touch these cameras, you will find the police right in the middle of our house.” Nadia mentioned, “Our house is in front of Al-Aqsa mosque that is why it is targeted by the colonial authorities. They observe and monitor us all the

time; they perform continuous aerial photo surveillance to our neighborhood and houses. We are living in constant terror here, for example, my husband and I can't travel together, someone should stay at home, you never know what can happen, the situation here is insecure and unstable.”

Settler terrorism, police militarism, and security surveillance are depicted by Women's narratives describing their colonized life spaces and practices. It is clear that men are also suffering from these techniques, often men are the ones targeted by the police and settlers.

## **2. Household Space**

This section illustrates how Palestinian families living in the Old City of Jerusalem are suffering from severe housing conditions including density, limited privacy, hygiene concerns, and lack of safety.

### **- Density**

Um Hasan, a 39 year old mother, used to live with her 4 children, husband, mother in law, two brothers in law and two sisters in law, one of whom has 4 children; a total of 15 family members living in almost 60 square meter house. She said, “In the family house, I feel I live in the street, I don't feel I live in a house for my own. I wish I can have a key for my house, to close it whenever I go out, and say out loud this key is for my own house. My mother in law stays in the house most of the time, so I go out and come back home and the door is always opened. I don't feel that this is my house, my entity.”

Um Hasan added, “until now my little boy doesn’t have a bed because there is no place to put it and the dome hemispherical ceiling structure in the old houses prevents us from using bunk beds with two or more levels of bedding to maximize available floor space. He sleeps on a small mattress on the ground in his grandmother’s room along with his 3 siblings.” She stressed, “The first thing I thought about before having more children is the size of the house. The house is very small; I can’t raise more children in his house. When my daughter gets married, how my son in law will come visit us and how I will invite him for lunch in this small house!! I become very depressed when thinking about the future.”

Um Ibrahim lives with her husband, seven children and her mother in law. She said, “I have six daughters and one son. My daughters sleep in one bedroom and my son used to sleep in the living room but now he sleeps in his grandmother’s room. He keeps complaining that he wants to have his own bedroom but there is no way he can have one in this small house.” She added, “When my children play, the neighbors complain saying that we annoyed them. When I feel angry, I can’t even shout because the neighbors would hear me, I feel I’m going to explode. These overcrowded houses and neighborhoods restrict us and choke us big time.”

“How would you imagine 16 individuals living in a 60 square meter house?” Said Um Othman, a 63 year old mother born in the Old City and currently living there with her husband, her son and his wife and his 6 children, her two divorced daughters and their 4 children. “My children don’t know how to live; the house is small and overcrowded. They don’t know where to put their

books and cloths; the cupboards are full and there are many things stuffed on top of these cupboards reaching the ceiling. We try to use every possible space to organize our belongings. We are 16 people in the house, if each one has 2 pairs of shoes, then you will have 32 pairs of shoes, and these alone need space.”

Um Othman illustrated, “I have a kitchen, a bathroom, a living room, and two bedrooms. My husband, my grandchild and I sleep in the living room, my daughters as well as their children sleep in one bedroom, my son, his wife and his children sleep in another bedroom. I wanted to bring more beds but there is no place to put them.” She continues, “In the morning we use the bathroom in turns, the ones whose school or work is geographically far from the Old City use the bathroom first then when one finishes, they call for next person to use the bathroom. I personally don’t like to wake up because I know as soon as I get out of bed I need to go to the bathroom, so I try to stay in bed until everyone finishes.”

Um Othman finds the weekend to be the most stressing time in such a small house, she stated, “The weekend is very stressful because all family members are in the house and sometimes guests come over. Every Friday my daughter, her husband and children come visit us, yesterday her husband told her that they should stop these visits because there is no place where they can sit and it is very noisy with all the children playing, shouting, and fighting with each other. It is very frustrating; I want to my daughter to visit me and for all my family members to gather but there is no space.”

Due to the household over crowdedness, Mirvat, who is the wife of Um Othman's son, can't find a place where she can tutor her child, she explained, "after we moved to live with my in laws, my son received very low marks at school, his teacher asked me what's wrong and whether we are facing some family problems because he used to get high marks. Here in my in laws' house, there is no private and quite place where we can go together through his homework. There are no libraries or centers in the Old City, where I can go with my son to go over his studies."She added, "I have a computer but there is no place where I can put it here and let my children benefit from it."

Mirvat finds winter the most challenging seasons to live in these small houses of the Old City, "In winter everything takes more space than usual, the furniture, the blankets, the clothes, the shoes, and the laundry, you can't find a place to put your feet on the ground. Also in winter and because of the cold weather, everybody stays at home, making things more challenging to do your everyday domestic duties like cleaning, cooking, laundry and child care."

Rania, who is Om Othman's daughter, tells another story depicting their challenge with household space, "once we brought a new refrigerator, we couldn't put it inside because the house's door and entrance are too small. We knocked down one of the house's walls, put the refrigerator inside, and build the wall back. We also had hard time to enter furniture into the house, many things got broken."

Manal is 42 years old and she is dwelling in an 18 square meter house with her husband and 7 children. She narrated the historical background of her house, "During the Ottoman rule, this neighborhood was a prison and all of these houses

were the prison's cells and my house was where the guard used to sleep, and in this corner of the house, they used to bury the dead bodies. What I want to say is that these buildings were not designed to be houses, we are suffocating in these inappropriate and very small houses." During the interview with Manal, some kids were playing outside and then suddenly their football entered her house, she explained, "there is no place for these poor kids to play; they come from different neighborhoods to play in this yard. In the summer, these kids bring their footballs and bicycles, the area becomes really noisy, and so you can't rest."

Um Adam spoke about her experience in living in 20 square meter house along with 8 family members, she said, "this house was a living room, bedroom, kitchen and a bathroom in the same time. It was difficult for us to accommodate ourselves to live in such a limited space; you can't eat, sleep or pee in this house. I felt I was living in the street, if I opened the door of the house, you would see my son bathing. Our toilet was really small; you can barely sit and then stand up still like a piece of wood, you can't move."

Sana' is a 56 year old mother living with her husband and three children in less than 25 square meter house. She said, "The house is too tight for us and my children have grown up and this house doesn't meet their needs. There is no free space here; every corner is stuffed with many different things, like books, blankets, clothes, shoes, food, plates and other things. With this limited space, it becomes harder to have a clean and neat house. This room has multiple usages; it is a saloon, living room, and bedroom in the same time. My children are not pleased with this situation, sometimes while they are having lunch or lying down,



people visit us, so they have to clear the space for visitors but they don't know where else to go. This house doesn't give them any sense of comfort or tranquility." She added, "My married son doesn't visit me a lot, he can't stand sitting in a limited, closed space, and when he visits, he doesn't come with his wife, they visit me separately because the house is too small." Sana' stressed, "This house is not appropriate for any sort of occasion; celebrations or consolations. When my daughter finished high school, we rented a hall to celebrate her graduation. This house is not useful for any activity."

Siham is 42 years old and she has 3 children living in almost 50 square meter house in the Old City for 13 years now. She suffers from the lack of adequate space, she explained, "This house was and still complete rubbish and disaster, the ceiling and the walls were cracked, I had no kitchen and no bathroom for 10 years. I have one bedroom or even half a bedroom because it is really small, my children sleep in it, and I sleep in the living room. I hate this house, I wish I can leave it, it is not appropriate for animals to live in it."

#### **- Privacy**

The lack of household space makes it difficult for family members to enjoy and maintain any sense of personal privacy. Nadia lives in a house along with other four families and they all share the same house yard.

Nadia's children lack the privacy in the family house, she explains, "once my daughter was wearing a cute dress celebrating her birthday, she was

embarrassed to get out of the room; she didn't want her uncle to see her. She doesn't even feel comfortable in her house."

Um Hasan shared similar story, "my children are frustrated with the limited space in the house. My daughter wanted to wear sleeveless shirt and put lipstick in the house but her dad was very strict and he didn't want her uncle to see her. Moreover, my sons always express dissatisfaction about the limited space; they don't know where to change their cloth. All my children don't enjoy any kind of privacy in this house."

Um Othman is also concerned about her son who faces difficult time to find a personal space, "my poor son puts a curtain when he changes his cloths. When he takes a bath, he can't get out of the bathroom, someone should give him his clothes to wear them inside the bathroom, and he can't dress outside comfortably."

Um Hasan herself feels that her freedom is very much constrained in the house, "I can't wear a nightgown or even pajamas, I don't have the basic right and freedom to wear whatever I want in my house, can you imagine! I don't know what to wear on summer days; I can't wear sleeveless shirts or shorts even though I feel very hot. My mother in law and brothers in law are always around, I feel pressured." Even on other intimate level, Um Hasan doesn't have a private space, "I used to feel very embarrassed each time I have sexual intercourse with my husband, I used to walk to the bathroom on tiptoes like thieves and hide the dirty towels, as for nobody to see them. I used to make excuses for not having sex to save a face and avoid this embarrassment and stress."

Manal thinks that in order for her house to meet her family's needs, it should be destroyed and built again. She said, "I don't enjoy any sort of privacy; my house is on the entrance of the neighborhood, so everyone who comes or leaves this area sees me. I can't even wear a nightgown; I always have the prayer clothes by my side. AlHalal (what is permitted by God) is now Haram (forbidden) in this house, there is no personal space, and you can't perform your basic rights." Manal continued, "My daughter can't change her cloths here, she goes to her grandmother's house, and she also sleeps there with her aunts. Even when she wants to express herself and write something, or if she wants to watch TV, she doesn't do it in this house. She always complains about not having a bedroom for her own, where she can bring her friend, sit and talk with them without anybody hearing them. I can't provide her with this privacy; there is no room in the house. Even if I want to make a birthday party for my daughter, I can't inside of this small house."

Um Zoher didn't feel comfortable talking to her husband in her own house. She stated, "When I used to sit and talk with my husband at night, everyone passing by our house could hear our voice. My neighbor is new bride, I hear her fighting with her husband all the time, if I was a curious woman, I would know all details about her life. Our houses don't provide us with basic privacy." She continued, "When my sister in law was living next to us, she used to know where we go, when we come back home, what we do, who visits us, every single details of our life."

Sana' also complained about the lack of private space where she can express herself freely, she said, "I don't like to get angry because I end up shouting at my children, and then the neighbors will hear me and know all about my family problems. So when I feel stressed out, I leave the house, and if anyone asks me where I'm going, I tell them I'm going to the cemetery." Sana' added, "When I lived with my in laws, I didn't have any freedom, privacy or independence, I couldn't do simple things, for example, I didn't dare to put a lipstick in the house. My father in law was like the leader and we are the followers or more like slaves. Once I was visiting my parents and I got back home after sunset, my father in law closed the door and didn't let me inside; he told me get back from where you came."

#### - **Hygiene Concerns**

The interviewed women don't only suffer from the lack of space, stability, privacy, and safety in their houses; they also suffer from living in unhygienic conditions. Their houses have poor sun access and bad ventilation, which in return cause humidity and allow mold or fungal growth.

Um Othman indicated, "We used to have direct sunlight coming into the house but not anymore, our neighbors built an additional floor and blocked the sun and this is causing humidity and mold growth in the house, when I wake up I directly open the windows to take some fresh air. I can't wait for summer to see a little bit of sunshine."

Um Adam talked about the lack of ventilation her neighbors are suffering from, “the other day I went to visit our neighbors, there is no air or sun entering their house, their house is 6 floors with no windows or any kind of ventilation. I asked them how they are dwelling in this house, they are suffocating, and they use fans and air conditioners all the time. I couldn’t breathe in their house, may God help them!”

Manal considers her house to be unhealthy to live in, she said, “The house receives no sun or air due to building density, neighbors are everywhere. Now my son is suffering from asthma but what can I do? There is no other option but to live in these clustered homes.”

Siham and her children also suffer from unsanitary living conditions, she said, “My house is not hygienic at all. My little child is suffering from asthma since he was born. He used to sleep one day in the house and the other day in the hospital. Due to the humidity and fungal growth, we had to put ventilation fans in the kitchen, bathroom, bedroom and the living room. From the moment I wake up I turn these fans on, or else we suffocate. When I hang wet laundry inside the house, my children can’t stand the smell of the washing powder and softener. When I cook, they get bothered by the food smell. They keep complaining that they can’t breathe. Also, the sun doesn’t enter the house at all, if you turn off the lights, you can’t see your finger, and it is total darkness, even in the daylight and noon time. We struggle to see sunlight and feel the air in the house.”

Moreover, the interviewed women explained how their houses are not equipped with basic rain and wind isolation materials. Sana’ narrated, “when it

rains, the house's walls and ceiling keep leaking, they are now soaked with water, I put many buckets under the dripping ceiling and walls. Look at this cupboard, layers of black and green color mould/fungus growing on the surface, I keep cleaning it but all is vain, I can't even look at it, it is terrible! I can't put carpets in the winter because they will get wet from the dripping ceiling. My daughter begs me to put a carpet because she feels very cold in the winter if I put a carpet and it get wet, there is no place where I can hang it to dry, it is impossible. I can't do anything about it, she should cope with this situation, and she can use a heater!" She added, "When the summer approaches, cockroaches come on this dirt, I kill them, then I clean the house, and in the next day I find more and more. I feel very terrified from cockroaches. This is very exhausting!"

Um Zoher indicated, "When we first rented this house in Jerusalem, it was complete rubbish, it was not even suitable for animals to live in it. Once I was coming back home and I saw many rats around my house, I ran to my sister's house, I sat on her kitchen's table and pulled my legs together, I felt very afraid, my face turned white, I can't even stand watching rats on TV, how about seeing many of them in front of my house! My heart stopped."

These women try not to spend much time in the household, they try to "escape" from it as not to "suffocate" or end up with physiological illness.

#### - **Lack of Safety**

Jerusalemite families suffer from the lack of safety in their houses, neighborhoods, and community as a whole. Women worry about their children's

safety in their inadequate living spaces including the hazardous household interiors and insecure outdoor surroundings.

Manal talked about the constant concerns about the safety of her children, “This ceiling is very dangerous; it might fall down any minute. First, I can’t afford to fix the ceiling. Second, if I fix the ceiling, I might cause damage to the structure of the house above us, and I can’t take this responsibility and make sure it won’t harm the neighbors living in the upper floor. Third, I won’t even take the risk to repair it because the Israel Antiquities Authority will come after me to sue me. So now my ceiling texture is peeling and falling off and when my children wake up in the morning they find their faces covered with white painting and cement.”

Um Othman also thinks that her house is not safe for little kids. She explained, “There are many sharp edges that can hurt them. We try to make use of every single inch in the house even if it is not convenient for children; there is nothing we can do. Look here at this small room, it used to be a storage, we converted it to a room and build stairs to reach it. This stairs is very slippery and dangerous; I feel terrified when the kids walk on it.”

Um Hasan is worried that her roof is not safe for her family, she said, “Once my daughter was standing here on the roof, she was going to fall down, if her uncle didn’t catch her in the right time, she would have been dead. We told the Ministry of Waqf and Religious Affairs that we want to put a fence to protect our children, they refused saying that we destroyed the infrastructure of the Old City. However, recently the Israeli authorities put a fence for security reasons, and of course the Ministry of Waqf and Religious Affairs can’t say anything about this.”

Um Hasan added, “Here in this neighborhood the houses’ rooftops are all open areas, there are no blocks that separates between my house’s rooftop and my neighbor’s house’s rooftop. So we don’t feel very safe.”

Um Zoher lacks the stability and safety in her rented house, she explained, “The owner of the house has recently decided to sell the house after we repaired it and pay lots of money. We are not protected in the rental contract; the owner can force us out at anytime. I don’t feel secure in this house.”

The interviewed women emphasized on other external threats to their safety. Um Ibrahim doesn’t feel comfortable when leaving her house, she narrated, “Once my husband was out of the country and I went to sleep at my parents’ house for two days, when I got back home, I found the house and windows opened, and the money was stolen from the drawer. I didn’t call the police because I was sure that who stole the money was one of my brothers in law or their sons. This is a family house no stranger can enter it without getting caught.”

Um Zoher indicated that she lives in a dangerous neighborhood, she explained, “Most of our neighbors take drugs, the strong kinds of drugs. The other day they came and threatened us, they told us if the police came and asked you anything, don’t say a word. After two days, the police came to arrest one of these neighbors, he ran away, they caught him and sprayed something in his eyes. In this neighborhood there are many drug dealers, and at night they come and sit under our windows.”

Such safety concerns related to drug dealers and addicts was also clear in Siham’s words, “You just can’t live in the Old City of Jerusalem, in front of my



house, there is a small, hidden area where drug addicts meet to smoke weed, and the smell of this shit they are smoking is very powerful. Every night I hear their voices, they come to buy drugs and marijuana. I feel really scared and I worry about my children to get out of the house at night. This is not a safe living environment.” The issue of drug addiction was addressed repeatedly by the interviewees stressing on the importance of curbing this widely existing phenomenon that threatens the safety of their family members.

During the interview, Fatimah’s daughter came back from school, Fatimah stressed, “My daughter is not allowed to go out. It is not safe out here; I worry about her a lot. She is back from school now and she doesn’t leave the house until the next morning.”

Manal shared similar worries about the lack of security in their surrounding environment, she said, “my children are not allowed to leave the house after 6pm. My son is a teenager; I don’t want him to meet corrupted boys, who can drag him into immoral directions. I have to know all my children’s friends, to make sure they stay safe.”

All family members who were present during the interview with Um Othman agreed that they don’t let their kids leave the house. Rania, who is Um Othman’s daughter, indicated, “I don’t allow my kids to go out, even if they want to go to the nearby grocery store. I don’t feel safe myself to walk alone at night, if I came home late after work, I call my big brother or my father to walk back home with me.”

Nadia shared another story of living in constant insecurity, “one time my son went to buy bread, I waited him for an hour and he didn’t show up, I felt very scared, I quickly wore my prayer outfit and went to search for him. I was afraid that something bad happened to him or that the police took him or he got into a fight with the settlers, especially that he was not carrying his identification card with him. In the Old City, nobody can move without carrying their identification card, it is not safe here.”

Sana’ also stressed on the lack of safety in this community represented by neighbors, who observe Sana’s family members and are considered another form of surveillance. She explained, “Neighbors spy on us and inform the Israeli authorities if we make any construction or adjustments to the house. We also don’t feel safe to leave the house. Our neighbor is a thief, he hides the things he steals in the roof top, if the police find these stolen stuff, they will accuse us. Moreover, there are a number of drug dealers in the area, if my son is single, there is a possibility of 90% that he would be part of this corrupted group of drug and weed addicts.”

The different experiences and stories women shared about their daily ordeals with household density, limited privacy, lack of security and sanitation, are reflected on their physical and mental health.

### 3. Health

This section investigates how the lack of space, privacy, hygiene and safety impact Jerusalemite families' health including both the physical and psychological functioning.

#### - Physical Functioning

The shortage of adequate and sanitary living conditions has heavily impacted residents' physical health. The interviewed women explained the types of physical illnesses that they and their family members are suffering from.

Um Zoher believes that the housing conditions resulted in her husband suffering from severe illness, she said, "When the neighbors drive their cars, the cars' smoke gets into my living room, we couldn't ask them to move their cars away and we couldn't close the windows either. My husband used to escape from the house because of the cars' smell and also the smell of the nearby sewage. He told me once to bring snacks and go to any park to have some fresh air. Before he died, he was really sick and wanted to leave the house but he couldn't move, he felt helpless, he was distressed, and he was in terrible pain." With her eyes filled with tear, Um Zoher continued, "My husband once said that people move to Jerusalem to receive the national insurance and medical care benefits, he believed that instead people become sick here. He was right! He came here and died."

Nadia suffers from severe vitamin D deficiency, she explains, "My doctor instructed me to sunbathe because I have low level of vitamin D in my bloodstream and its causing me bone and muscles illness. Where should I go

sunbathing? On the roof when you are under constant surveillance by the Israeli police and watched by the neighbors. I'm sure the neighbors will start blabbering asking themselves for whom I'm uncovering myself and whom I'm trying to seduce. There is no private space." Nadia continued, "My neighbors are raising pigeons, so all their pigeons' droppings, feathers and dirt is on my roof and my clean laundry, and this is causing my child to have chronic lung problems, asthma and allergy."

Um Hasan also experiences similar challenges with her neighbors, she indicated, "Some of my neighbors constructed their houses a while ago and throw their construction waste into my roof. This part of the roof became a toxic waste dump, if I complain they will say it is not your business, this is our property. This waste attracts snakes, spiders, rats, mosquitoes, cockroaches and the insect with 44 legs especially in summer time. I'm always worried that my children will get bitten by these animals and insects, it's very unhygienic living environment!"

Spending much time in the house might negatively impact Sana's health, she said, "Do you think I like to stay at home? Of course not, I keep myself busy with activities outside the house, I'm sure if I spend more time in it my physical health will deteriorate. This house causes me many infections especially in winter because I spend more time in this rotten house."

Nadia and Manal have a hard time and leg pain reaching the rooftop to hang their Laundry on the roof. Nadia explained, "Can you imagine how exhausting to walk up and down this long stairs carrying a heavy basket with cloths. I'm

experiencing some health problems with my legs because of that.” Manal is desperately hoping, “I wish I can enlarge my house to have a space where I can hang my laundry, I have to do it on the roof using the ladder, and it is very dangerous to climb this ladder and this causes my legs to ache all the time.”

Um Othman also suffers leg pain when walking up and down a long stairs to reach their house. “I have difficult medical conditions, I’m diagnosed with Osteoporosis, bone disease, and I can’t bend my knees without feeling sharp pain. I used to be able to clean the house, move the furniture, walk the stairs quickly but not anymore, I even pray while sitting on the chair, I can’t kneel. I used to be physically strong; it makes me feel sorry to see how weak I’m now.

The stress and agony Um Hasan feels due to the limited and inappropriate housing space was reflected on her health, she illustrated, “I take vitamins everyday to keep me feel strong and energetic and I drink milk to gain some weight. I have some health problems with my bones and muscles because I feel tense and angry all the time. Sometimes when I’m very nervous, my stomach hurts me, I start vomiting and then I can’t eat anything for at least four days. This house put me under tremendous pressure.”

### **- Psychological Functioning**

The neglected and deteriorated household conditions don’t only impact families’ physical function but also their psychological functioning. Women stressed on how the environmental factors influence the psychological health of themselves and their families and on the need to improve the housing conditions.

After her husband passed away, Um Zoher feels lonely in her small house. She says, “My sons and daughters don’t come to visit me because my house is very small, so I go visit them instead. However, sometimes I complain and ask them to visit me, I need them to visit me, I’m an old lonely woman and I really need my children to be around me to be able to survive in this life.” Um Zoher added, “I used to live in a spacious house with beautiful furniture and a garden on a hill in AlRam city. I used to enjoy the sunshine, the clean air, and the smell of trees. Due to the closures and checkpoints, we moved to live in this small house in Jerusalem. I can’t stay in the house for a long time; I keep myself busy with any kind of activity outside of the house. I can’t breathe, I feel pressured in this house. I have been living in this house for four years now but I feel it has been ages, I feel old and fragile. When you want to rest and lay down, it is not even possible in this neighborhood. It is very noisy, children play in front of my house because there are no playgrounds where they can play, so when I’m tired, I can’t sleep, their voices in my ears. ”

Rania stressed on the issue that children can’t find appropriate and safe places where they can play and this in return has a significant impact over the children’s psychological state. She indicated, “my little nephew stays at this small house and keep crying all day long, there is no place where she can play. I can feel that she is unhappy and angry.”

During the interview, Um Hasan panicked when her son’s friends came over, she explained, “I start to panic whenever I have guests in the house, especially when little kids come to play with my children. If they throw anything

from the window, the Israeli police will come directly to see who did it. I can't help but to feel terrified and worried." Um Hasan added, "At some point I needed psycho therapy, I didn't hesitate to ask for help, I'm an educated woman and I was fully aware that I needed to go to a psychiatrist. I used to be very nervous, keep yelling at my children and beat them sometimes. However, after completing several therapy sessions, I became more calm and relaxed. I learned how to better accommodate myself to the harsh living circumstances and how to communicate well with my family members."

Siham takes her 3 children to Jordan every summer to visit her family there. She pointed out, "my children can't wait for summer vacation to leave Jerusalem and spend two months in Jordan. They love it there; they go trips with my siblings and nephews. They enjoy their time, and enjoy feeling free; living is much more beautiful there. When we leave Jordan, they keep crying all the way, they hate it here in Jerusalem; they feel imprisoned, lonely and bored. I can't take them recreation trips here, the checkpoints restrict my movement." Siham's vision towards the future carries meanings of hopelessness and despair. "I don't need my children to support me in the future, let them just support themselves! Do you think I would even live long to see them grow up? I will die soon, no life left for me," said Siham while ironically smiling.

Um Othman is worried about her son, she elaborated, "My son, his wife and his 6 children are currently living with us because they can't afford renting a house. My son is very pressured, tired and depressed lately, he and his family don't have any freedom or private space, and they feel very restricted living in the

family house. When he comes home, he doesn't talk with anybody and he barely eats, yesterday he didn't eat anything. He is not happy, he is mentally exhausted!"

Living in constant anxiety affected Um Othman's wellbeing, she explained with agony, "During the past couple of years, we suffered heavily from miserable housing conditions, poverty, and family problems. I live in anxiety, I keep thinking how we are going to live and survive in this world, sometimes I don't sleep for days, and I'm very worried. People used to tell me that I look young for my age; I was very happy and had good looks back then. Now, I feel very old and tired. I don't even smile; there is no reason to smile. These difficult living circumstances killed our spirits and sucked the energy out of us. We are like the living dead."

On similar note, Sana' clarified that sometimes she is constantly worried and concerned, "I didn't live even one beautiful day because of this family and housing hardships. I swear to God that sometimes I don't sleep, I feel very worried and anxious."

The lack of security in a militarized zone also influences Jerusalemite women psychological health. "The feeling of fear and panic is when this moment approaches, when the Jews tell us take your stuff and leave, I keep thinking about this moment. It is normal to keep worrying and thinking about this moment because it's my house, even if it is a very small one, and it's my family, my stability, it's my whole life!" Um Hasan said. Nadia commented on Um Hasan statement, "I'm also afraid that someday they will demolish this house on our heads, I keep asking God to keep and bless our home. Whenever I leave the



house, I recite Ayat Al-Kursi (verses of the Quran) to protect the house.” Nadia added, “I feel pressured from this house, the neighbors, and the Israeli authorities and oppressed from my husband and his family. In the summer vacation, I escape to my parents’ house in Jordan. This pressure has negative effect on my mental health.”

Due to limited space, most of the interviewees can’t hold any occasion in their houses, they can’t invite people, they can’t host guests, and they don’t allow their kids to bring their friends over. Some of the interviewees expressed a feeling of embarrassment and anxiety to have guests in the house. Um Othman described how all family members feel stressed when guests come over, “the tension occurs when we have guests in the house, everyone feels upset, especially if one wants to study, they can’t find a quiet place.” Manal also indicated how stressed they feel when guests come visit them, “Many people visit us on Fridays and in Ramadan, they go to Al-Aqsa mosque to pray and come to our house to rest or to sleep by. When they come on a sudden, I feel very embarrassed and stressed out because most of the times my house is messed up and my children are sleeping on the mattresses on the ground, so there is no place where they can sit. My children get really bothered and upset because they have to get out of the house to leave some space for the guests.”

Um Ibrahim experiences feelings of embarrassment and stress from the bad household conditions, she recounted , “one time a strange woman was seeking a wife for her son, so she came to see my daughter, I didn’t know where to let her sit, my house is not appropriate for guests, so I took her to my in laws’ house, then

she asked me why I took her there, I told her that my house is very small and my little children are all in the house so it is not quite and convenient to sit in my house. I felt very much stressed and embarrassed; I kept crying all day.” Um Ibrahim added, “My daughter is 18 years old, her dad keeps telling her ‘don’t wear tight outfits in front of your teenager brother and cousins.’ You can’t believe the pressure she is living under, she can’t wear whatever she wants even in her own house. The other day she said, ‘I’m sick of this house, I wish I can die and rest from this life.’ I don’t know what to do; I can’t provide her with a private space of her own.”

Sana’ goes into major depression and fatigue in winter, “When it rains, I start yelling at my children, I fight with them, and you can hear me shouting from Al-Aqsa mosque. I tell my children, if anyone calls, tell them I’m not home; I don’t want anyone to see this mess. My daughter once told me ‘for God’s sake, stop yelling, go fix the house if this makes you angry and nervous, it is not our fault!’ how can I fix this damn house, we can barely afford to drink, eat and pay off our debt.” Sana’ recalled the most recent incident when she was very confused and disordered, “Recently we have received another penalty notice for the unauthorized construction we did for the house. They don’t have mercy, we just finished paying the previous construction fines, and here we go, more fines to pay, they don’t give us a break. When I receive these notices, I panic and lose control of myself. I can’t handle this anymore. ”

Accordingly, the living space challenges, which women described, are closely linked with family members’ health deterioration and the development of

certain mental disorders including anxiety, depression, and stress. The lack of suitable housing conditions would inevitably impact the daily household dynamics and individuals' interaction within the family, the neighborhood and the entire community.

#### **4. Household Conflict Dynamics**

This section highlights the tension and conflict between nuclear and extended family members, relatives and neighbors stemming from housing problems in the Old City of Jerusalem. This includes, first, the ownership, construction and expansion challenges between dwellers struggling over adequate housing space, second, the disagreement and distress caused by generation gap, and third, the social pressure and interference, which all combine together restricting women's life spaces and choices and enforcing colonial governance.

##### **- Struggle Over Space: Home Ownership, Construction and Expansion**

Um Adam described the conflict that takes place between neighbors over living space. She said, "Disputes on housing space is increasing with the population growth and with the restrictions the authority is imposing on house construction and renovation. I worry that my children will fight on the house ownership in the future. The other day I told my neighbor that I'm thinking to build two bedrooms and a bathroom on the roof of my house, she replied, 'how are we going to sunbath if you build on your roof? You will prevent the sun from entering our house.' I told her sunbath from my ass. Once I built a kitchen on the

roof, the neighbors went and informed the police; they did so either because the construction I did was causing real damage or because they were jealous or maybe both. Then, the police came, destroyed the kitchen and made me pay a 6 thousand Jordanian Dinar fine. Here the neighbors spy on each other and give the police detailed information about everyone's life don't feel safe here between the neighbors.”

Um Ibrahim lives with other 40 members in the family house in the Old City. She explained the type of house ownership and how it organizes the relations between family members. She said, “My father in law had 13 daughters, so he was afraid that their future husbands will take over the family house. Therefore, he decided to make this house a family Waqf endowing this property to his children and grandchildren. As a result, no one can sell or buy any part of this house, that's why we still live together. My husband and brothers in law live in the house; each one of them pays 500 Jordanian Dinars to his sisters each year for their inheritance rights. They asked for more in the beginning and many disputes occurred but we told them that we can only afford this amount of money, which is not bad, after a number of year, they can gather this money and buy a house of their own.”

According to Um Ibrahim's narrative, the family Waqf system keeps the property ownership within members of the same family, and therefore, protects Jerusalemite families' existence and hinders the colonial government from destabilizing these families' presence in the Old City of Jerusalem.

Um Ibrahim added, “It is true that no one can sell the house, which in return minimize the conflict that occur on house ownership, however, disagreement happens on other issues like house renovation and expansion. After we added an addition to our house, the family started to blabber about it accusing us of stealing my father in law property. They envied us for fixing the house without even knowing the reality of our everyday misery living in a small house. Then the son of my dead brother in law came claiming that he had a legal right to live in the family house and that he couldn’t afford renting a house. After we paid lots of money and suffered from debts to fix the house’s yard, he took it, closed my balcony, demolished my stairways and built an apartment for him and his family. He tricked my husband telling him that he would pay us back the money we put to fix the yard, until today he hasn’t given us one penny.”

Um Ibrahim’s story reminded Um Saleh with her own family hardship struggling for housing space, she said, “My son started to build an apartment on the house’s roof, my brothers in law stopped him and took the roof by force. My sons wanted to get into a fight with their uncles but my husband and I stopped them, we didn’t want more troubles in our life. My sons today don’t speak with their uncles. Um Zoher commented on Um Ibrahim’s story, “everyday we hear such stories. This proves that everyone should live in their own independent house. She laughed and added, “If I were you I would sell this house and buy or rent another one far away, avoid this headache and live peacefully?.”

Um Ibrahim continued giving examples to the type of the ongoing tension within the family house, “my brother in law is annoyed from the noise our ceiling

makes when it rains. Last winter, they made us put carpets and blankets on the ceiling to minimize the noise, we didn't know how to dry them after that and started to smell really bad bringing insects to the house, so we through them away. This winter we told them we have no blankets or carpets left to put on the ceiling, so they are asking us now to put asphalt concrete on the surface of the ceiling, and we can't afford it. They are giving us a hard time to live.”

As for Nadia the reason of tension in the house is her mother in law, she explained, “My mother in law wants to control us, she interferes in everything, and wants to know everything. When my children play in the house yard, she gets annoyed and shouts at them, she wants us to stay inside our rooms. She creates stress and pressure in this house.”

Um Hasan narrated an incident when her brothers in law tried to take advantage of the conflict that happened with her mother in law to throw her out of the house. She said, “One time my son was trying to fix the power cables with his wet hands, I was afraid that he would get an electric shock, my mother in law came to see what was happening, so I slightly raised my voice asking her to wait for a little while. She thought I was shouting at her, so she started crying, slapping and hitting her face. I swear to God I didn't shout at her, I just raised my voice because I was afraid about my son and I wanted to make sure she heard me. She disgraced me, so I left the house and went to my parents' house. My brothers in law wanted to take advantage of this event and conspired to kick me out and bring their divorced sister to live in the house. They forgot that I served their mother for more than 20 years; they didn't even give me a chance to explain myself.”

Sana' explained how her husband's relatives wanted to take possession of their house, she said, "After my father in law passed away and after we fixed the house, my husband's relatives who were living in the West Bank and Jordan, came to Jerusalem claiming ownership rights to the house. Our house became a sweet cake that everyone wants to take bite from. My husband's aunt once said, 'If it was the last day of my life, I want to see you kicked out of this house.' Can you believe this hatred and jealousy?"

To ensure that no future conflict happens between family members over house ownership and expansion, Sana' and her brothers in law agreed that if any of their children get married, they should leave the house and find another place to live in. She explained, "as long as my sons are single, I can keep them here but when they get married, there is no enough space for them, their wives and children. Of course this makes the idea of getting married a challenging one for my sons; my eldest son is 29 years old and he can't afford buying or renting a house, so how is he ever going to get married? My children complain and hold us responsible for not being able to secure appropriate housing for them, they keep telling me that instead of putting all of this money fixing this small house, we should have bought a piece of land, where everyone of my sons can build his own apartment."

Um Zoher used to go with her husband and sleep at their son's house; they had a bedroom for their own in that house. She narrated, "After my husband died, my daughter in law took the bedroom we used to sleep in, I think it is a smart tactic from her to tell me that this bedroom is not mine and there is no place for

me at my son's house and I'm not welcomed there. This incident woke me up; I realized that I can never live at my son's house. Now, I live alone in a rented small house and I have my own independent space without feeling a burden on anybody's shoulders even my son who is from my own flesh and blood. I put limits between me and my children as to avoid potential conflicts."

The struggle or conflict over living space is an integral part of Siham's everyday life, she explained, "When my husband comes home, he doesn't want to hear any voice, he wants to sit alone and rest in the living room with no one bothering him. So, my children and I enter the bedroom and close the door to avoid getting into problems with him. We feel really pressured and imprisoned in this small room, we shouldn't make any noise, I can't go through my children assignments, and we can't talk or breathe. One time, my husband was drunk; he kicked us out of the house late at night and shouted at us saying 'you annoyed me with your noise, go find another place for you to live in.' My children don't like their father, in fact I take my eldest son to a therapist because he keeps having nightmares and day dreams about his father beating and cursing him. These conflicts in the house have a huge impact on my children's physiological health."

In her early years of marriage, Siham moved to the Old City to live in the same building of her husband's first wife. Siham described the conflict that happened between the two of them, "when I first came to this house, it has no furniture, my husband asked his first wife to give me a mattress to sleep on but she refused and I slept on the ground. When we started to fix the house, she came and broke the window glass and she injured the hand of one of the workers. I used



to stay in Al-Aqsa mosque during the renovation period and come home late. She made many troubles for me, she used to curse me and shout at me in the street in day light and at night and in front of the neighbors, she didn't care. She used to cut off electricity and water supplies from my house; she gave me a hard time. My husband bought her a house in Wadi Al-Joz and she moved there. I wanted to live in her house because it is bigger but she refused and let her son to live in the empty house. So now her son, his wife and children live upstairs, we don't talk or deal with each other to avoid tension.”

All of these women have experienced different levels of conflict over space, which occurs between nuclear family members, extended family members and relative, and neighbors. From these stories, women show how tough they can be in protecting their family and their homes. This conflict over space is a struggle for survival and existence in a city, where resources are decreasing not because of the natural population growth but because of settler colonial measures of the Israeli government. The struggle over space is not just between the colonizer and the indigenous people, but also between the indigenous people themselves. Women's stories reveal the ruthless reality of everyday struggle between the locals over living space and how some people would harm each other and would collaborate with the Israeli colonial government, the oppressor, by providing them with information about their neighbors' unauthorized construction just to protect and secure their own property, living spaces and existence. This everyday conflict over property and resources creates a sense of mistrust between members of the

same community, neighborhood and family and therefore destabilizes the social cohesion in the Old City of Jerusalem.

- **Generation Gaps**

Um Hasan described how the generation gap between her mother in law and her children causes intense arguments in the house, she said, “My mother in law keeps telling my children that this is A’eb and Haram (shameful and forbidden) without even giving them a reason; children nowadays want answers and explanations, not orders. So my children feel annoyed and irritated from her, I try to calm them down and convince them not to argue with her, I explain to them that she is an old woman from a different generation. Once my child asked me how women give birth, I explained for him in simple words that every mother has an opening in her body and after nine months of pregnancy, this opening becomes bigger and the baby comes out from it. When my mother in law heard me, her face turned white and criticized me for being too bold. She wants me to raise my children in a similar manner to how she was being raised and this doesn’t work.

Um Adam illustrated how the new generation is frustrated from the harsh living conditions and might go seek for better opportunities out of this country and away from their families. She said with tears in her eyes, “My grandchild told me yesterday that when he finishes his education, he will take his girlfriend, get married, work and live a better life abroad. He said that he won’t come back or even have any relation with us. Can you imagine! It hurts me to hear him say

these words, after everything we went through to secure a decent life for them, your children can abandon you in a blink of an eye.”

She continued, “People used to be kind and good to the degree that made our life easier and beautiful, we forgot that we were living in small and poor houses; we used to go out, sit with the neighbors, chat and have a good time. Today nobody cares about you, if you die, no one will notice or feel sorry for you. I believe that people nowadays have no mercy in their hearts, they only think about their individual interests, even your children, you want the best for them and they want to create troubles for you. Now with the growing number of people, the lack of resources and the crowded and pressured neighborhoods and houses having no ability to build or extend your house, many clashes and problems occur between families, relatives and neighbors, people are being separated from each other.”

Um Zoher’s children don’t come visit her very often, she expressed her frustration saying, “this generation forgets about us, the elderly, they remember us when we are young and strong, they don’t understand that the elder person needs care and love like never before. My children got married and have their own life, no one of them comes visit me, and this is wrong. It is true that I don’t have enough space in the house for visitors but this is not an excuse for them not to visit me.”

The generation gap that can cause household conflict in Abo Salah’s point of view was expressed in his following words, “In the old time, children used to respect their parents and will do anything as not to see them unhappy or angry.

Before my parents put their heads on the pillow to sleep, I used to go kiss their hands and make sure they are pleased with me. Nowadays, your children don't really care if you are happy or not about their actions, they only think about their own benefits as if they live alone."

Um Hasan, Um Adam Um Zoher and Abo Salah talked about generation gap and struggle each from a particular angle; they described how conflict occurs when family members from different generations are stuck together in a limited inadequate household, and when family members from different generations don't share similar values and principles, and when the new generation has a growing tendency towards individualism. Regardless of the difference in the meanings they give describing the generation gap, this generation gap hinders women from living peacefully and harmoniously with their relatives and neighbors and would in turn cause a lack of familial and social cohesion.

#### - **Social Pressure and Interference**

Um Saleh narrated a story that mirrors the social invasion for one's private space, "After her husband passed away, neighbors and relatives started interfering in my aunt's private issues, they observed her mobility, her actions, and every single detail of her life. She lived under pressure, and so she decided to get married at an age of 62 years old, just to escape from problems surrounding her."

Nadia doesn't feel comfortable walking in the Old City while wearing bold colors, she said, "I can't go out wearing a green or a yellow headscarf or even a colorful handbag because relatives, neighbors and everyone else will criticize me.

My daughter has recently started wearing a headscarf; it is not familiar or very much accepted for women to walk without covering their hair. Jerusalem is a conservative city not like Jordan or even Ramallah, where I feel I can wear whatever I want.

Um Hasan also experiences similar interference from her neighbors in her private life, she stated, “I worry a lot about what neighbors say about me, they observe you and hold you accountable for your actions. Sometimes I resort to lying to do whatever I want; it is the best way to make things go smoothly with no troubles.”

Abo Salah explained how he felt angry when his nephew annoyed his daughter by interfering in her personal life, “I was going to hit my nephew the other day but I controlled myself. My daughter came back late from the university and he started cursing her using bad words. He is very jealous of her because she goes to university; I told him that he needs 100 years to be educated and well mannered like her.”

Jerusalemite families feel that they are constantly observed by their community members, who evaluate and judge their everyday practices and choices. The social pressure and interference is not as tangible as the limited house size but it similarly restricts residents’ living spaces.

## **5. Household Cooperation Dynamics**

This section emphasizes the cooperation dynamics that evolve between nuclear and extended family members, relatives and neighbors to help them divide roles, share responsibilities and manage specific housing matters in times of crisis.

### **- Cooperation in Times of Crisis**

Sana's quest for adequate living space is premised upon permanent cooperation between her and her husband. She explained, "Managing the household issues is not the responsibility of the father or the mother alone, it is the responsibility of both. He helps me with the domestic duties because I can't do the cooking, cleaning, and raising the children all by myself. We built this house together carrying the construction bricks up and down the long stairway; therefore, enhancing our living conditions was a shared idea and effort between the two of us. We cooperate and divide the tasks between us and this way we feel with each other more."

Sana' used her context and legal condition to reveal the family cooperation dynamics in facing daily ordeals with the Israeli authorities. She said, "My husband and I go together to every Israeli court summon related to the house authorization and to every human rights organization and to the Palestinian authorities seeking for official help in our case. No one of us can go by oneself and take this burden alone; it is easier when we do it together".

After getting divorced, Fatima's family provided her with a small apartment where she can live with her children, she said, "my mother and brother live next

to me, they stood by me and helped me a lot to settle here in the Old City with my children.” Moreover, what makes it easier for Fatima to face daily life upheavals is the solid bonding with her neighbors, she illustrated, “I have a good relationship with my neighbors, who helped me a lot in the times of crisis and still are standing by my side. We share each other’s happiness and sadness, failure and success and dreams and fears and we never let anybody down. This helps us in maintaining our existence in the city despite the poor household conditions and the brutality of the Israeli authorities.”

Furthermore, Fatima’s eldest son works and gives her some money to cover the household expenses and save some to renovate the house, she stated, “I don’t have a job, only have the insurance subsidies as a source of income. Every summer break my son works in construction from 4am till 9pm, he brings 120 Shekels every working day, and he contributes half of the money he earns to the household. Sometimes he works after school whenever he finds any job opportunity.”

What enables 16 individuals to live in a 60 square meter house is to have cooperation between these individuals, Um Othman said, “We would never be able to survive in such living conditions, if we didn’t cooperate and feel with each other. There is no space in this house for anyone to think about personal interests, we seek to achieve the common good for all family members. My son and two daughters work, they provide for their own children and help me and their father in covering other household expenses and pay the housing taxes and fines to the Israeli municipality.”

There is a shared understanding between Manal, her husband and children on the importance of cooperation to be able to live peacefully in their house, she explained, “we understand and help each other, there are roles divided between us, for example, when we have lunch, everyone participate in cleaning up; one cleans the table, one washes the dishes, one sweeps the floor and so on. It is not only my daughter but my sons should take part in the domestic duties. When you live in a very limited house space, you should always keep it clean because if it gets messed up, you won’t be able to move or do anything. So having a neat living place is a shared responsibility between all family members.”

Manal has a good relationship with her in laws, who help her in providing a private space for her teenage daughter, she explained, “my daughter doesn’t feel comfortable in the house, she has 6 brothers, so she feels very restricted. Her grandmother and aunts pamper her, and try to make her happy by bringing her cloths and gifts. My daughter spends most of her time at her grandmother’s house, she even invite her girlfriends there. This helped me a lot in dealing with the pressure my daughter feels because with the limited recourses and household size we have, I can’t provide her with better living conditions. I’m very grateful for my in laws for standing by our side in this situation.”

Siham’s neighbors gave her significant assistance when she was renovating her house, she said, “my neighbors provided me with a shelter when my house was under construction. They welcomed me and my children in their house, and I stayed at their place for a month. They were really kind with me. I don’t have



family who I can rely on here in Jerusalem but my neighbors are like family to me, I count on them whenever I'm in trouble.”

The interviewed women highlighted various forms of cooperation that take place either between family members living under the same roof or between different families within the community of the Old City of Jerusalem. Such forms of cooperation are fundamental to assist these families in standing still in front of life's crises, coping with the limited life spaces and options available for them and in maintaining and strengthening their existence within their city.

Those women and their families might be describing their familial and community solidarity and cooperation in a romantic rhetoric because this rhetoric or representation to such social dynamics is an integral part of reinforcing their co-existence and presence in a city full of complexities and restrictions. They internalize these representations and romantic meanings to help themselves in surviving this overbearing situation.

Moreover, one should take into consideration that cooperation and conflict dynamics don't occur in isolation of each other, these dynamics are highly integrated and intertwined. According to Sen (1990), the household is a site of cooperative conflict, where cooperation exists when it results in specific outcomes that are preferred than the outcomes of non-cooperation, and where the bargaining process exists over the decision to cooperate or not cooperate at all when the outcomes don't prove to be satisfactory. We should take into account that, as Naila Kabeer (1994) argues, the member's decision or choice to cooperate is not a totally individual one and is not driven by a mere personal need, this decision is

influenced by the social norms; “the powerful normative pressures backed up by the threat of social sanctions, which make the ‘choice’ of household membership a social rather than a purely individual one.”

Therefore, Jerusalemites from the same family and neighborhood decide to cooperate not only because cooperation results in personal satisfactory results but also because cooperation means belonging to a certain group of people, the family or the whole community. However, this cooperation ends when the person feels that one’s living space is at risk even if it leads to social sanction. One clear example is the dispute that occurred between Um Othman’s family and her brother in law on using the available space on the roof, she explained, “We had a hard time finding a place to put the water tank and the solar water heating system, my brother in law prevented us from using the house’s roof saying that he wanted the roof for his kids to play in it because his house is too small. We live in the same building and we also have the right to use the available space on the roof. We begged him, he refused. Many problems happened between us after that incident, we don’t talk with him anymore.” In that case the need for living space outweighed the need for familial membership and the threats of social sanction, and therefore, Um Othman’s brother in law became an outcast after deciding not to cooperate with Um Othman’s family.

Sana’ narrative also indicates how the need to secure one’s living space would urge members of the same family not to cooperate together at a certain point. Sana’ reached a significant conclusion about family cooperation and conflict dynamics in the current situation by saying, “Family cooperation comes

to an ending under such difficult living circumstances. My sons don't support us financially in at least covering the house expenses with their father; they are selfish, they think only about themselves. They tell me if we are going to continue giving you money to spend on the house's everyday expenses and construction, we will never save money, get married and have a house for our own. They keep accusing me and their father for doing nothing for their benefit and future. I'm afraid that when their father and I pass away, my children will fight between each other over this house."

From Sana's story, we can understand the bargaining format of the household and the cooperative and non-cooperative choices that has to be made on everyday basis. Kabeer (1994) explains how the implicit contractual relationship including rights and obligations between families members can be renegotiated leading to contract break down when the individual's circumstances change. When Sana's two sons decided to stop contributing to the household income, they chose non-cooperation and decided to break this implicit contract that oblige them to share the burden of household's expenses along with their parents because their circumstances had changed and they reached a point where they had to secure their own living space and get married and therefore, cooperating with their parents would hinder them from doing so.

This vivid intersection between cooperative decision leading to familial and social cohesion and non-cooperative decision leading to conflicting preferences is the reality of Jerusalemites everyday life. From the interviewed women's narratives, we can understand how cooperative alternatives become difficult and

sometimes unattainable under the Israeli colonial governance that forces family members to live in houses, neighborhoods, and communities that lack the basic standards of respectable life. Therefore, governmental, nongovernmental, national and international efforts at this stage are also very important to reinforce Palestinians' existences and continuity and to strengthen the familial ties and community networks in Jerusalem. These efforts should be directed towards providing a hygienic, secured and private households and a safe environment from settler and political terrorism, which in return will create a fertile ground for familial and social cooperation.

## **6. Survival and Resistance Tactics**

This section examines women's tactics that offer hope of redemption from the overbearing situation in their communities. These tactics, which are the arts of the weak, challenge the strategies of the powerful and create a space for these women and their families to live peacefully. These women don't only try to deflect or escape the disciplinary control of the power but they also re-appropriate the system to their own ends without totally leaving it.

"I have no other choice but to cope and find solutions and alternatives for a better life, if I keep complaining about the compressed and unsuitable house; I will become mentally and physically ill, make many family problems, and eventually lose my children and husband and ruin my life," Um Hasan said.

### - **Finding a Refuge**

Many women found technology as a solution to move beyond the physical household space and expand their dimensions. Siham explained, “My poor children don’t have a place to play either inside the house or outside. So my children and I saved some money and bought a laptop as a let out, to learn and entertain themselves.” Um Hassan also brought a computer for her children, she illustrated, “There is no safe place for my children to play outside the house. I don’t allow my children to play outside because if their football touched any of these surveillance cameras, the police will come to the house for investigations on the incident. I bought them a computer to spend time on it and stay home. The computer takes them to a different world of their own; they can talk and play with their friends virtually. This way I feel less worried on their safety, I also observe what they do on the internet, to make sure they are using it wisely. I also bring them toys, like Lego, just to let them play inside the house and avoid the stress and fear.”

Rania finds refuge for herself and her children by going to work and putting her children in a kindergarten, she said, “My family members who stay in the house all day are the most stressed and pressured ones. I go out to work, I breathe fresh air, I meet new people, and sometimes I see my friends. I get back home at 4pm, I feed my children, give them a bath and we sleep. I don’t spend much time in the house. I also put my children in the kindergarten, I don’t want them to stay in the house all day because there is no place here for them to play; they get bored

and make a lot of noise bothering everybody else in the house. They enjoy their time in the kindergarten.”

Due to the tension that continuously arises from the limited household space, Um Othman tries to create a nice atmosphere in the house, she explained, “I bake a cake or make Kunafa just to make everyone happy. Sometimes my grandchild feels like dancing, I turn on the TV, put a song for her to dance, I tell my grandchildren play and enjoy your time. Despite the fact that I get bothered by the noise they make, I don’t force or pressure them to sit and stay quite. I ask everyone in the house to feel comfortable.” Sana’ does similar thing to Um Othman in her quest to create a peaceful living environment, she clarified, “I try to gather my children to have lunch together to make them close to each other, I also make sure that they respect and not to annoy one another. This way we can endure living under such deprived circumstances.”

When Sana’ is depressed, she tries to find a let out by leaving her house, she explained, “Sometimes I go out for a walk in Salah Al-Din Street, not to buy any particular things, just to take in clean air and see new faces, or I go to Al-Aqsa to pray or attend religion lectures, or I visit my best friends in the Old City, and then I come back home after sunset happy and less stressed out. In cold rainy weather, when I can’t go out feeling pressured, I watch a Turkish TV series or knit wool, it makes me feel better.”

Some women try to find space by visiting relatives inside or outside the country. Siham and Nadia take their children every summer break to Jordan visiting their parents there. They both agreed that they and their children enjoy

going to Jordan, where they can move freely, have various options for entertainment and recreation. Um Hasan takes her kids to her parents' house for a couple of days in Nablus, where they have a good time away from the stress and restrictions they experience in their house in Jerusalem. On the other hand, Um Ibrahim takes her children every once in a while to nearby parks, she said, "my children feel very bored and pressured in the house. They can't play here, the neighbors keep complaining about the noise my children make. So, I take them to the Bell Garden (a garden in the western part of Jerusalem), the Mount of Olives (a mountain overlooking the Old City of Jerusalem), or any other spacious green area, where breathe clear air and play without having to worry about anything."

Women and their children participate in different activities, like sport, trips, educational courses, and social networking events move being their insecure and constrained spaces. The financial capabilities differ from one woman to another, so they keep looking for solution and alternatives to participate in these activities to break out from their controlled restricted spaces. Um Hasan explained, "I can't afford sending my kids to take private swimming course. Instead I search for opportunities where I can send them to summer camps and educational trips that are funded by different community centers and organizations here in Jerusalem. My daughter went to France last year with Nidal Center for Community Development; she met foreign people and saw a new community, and after 12 days, she came back happy and fresh with positive energy. She would never been able to travel without the center; we can't afford the plane ticket. She is applying

for another opportunity to attend a conference in Lebanon, Inshallah they will accept her application.”

#### - **Household Arrangement Solutions**

Women keep searching for any possible way to arrange the limited household space to meet their continuously developing needs. The solutions they find varies between material repair to the house and placing rules and regulations to organize everyday family dynamics and interactions.

Manal can't extend her household space because she lives in a clustered neighborhood and the Israeli authorities will come right after her if she adds even one square meter to her house. Therefore, she did some renovations only within the borders of her house to efficiently use the available space, she illustrated, “we used to have a small toilet outside the house, which was difficult to go to in cold weather, so I built one inside the house... I hang my laundry on the roof top, in winter, I hang it in the middle of the house but it get dirty with everyone getting in and out of the house, so I had to buy a dryer machine, I only use it when it is really cold because the cost of electricity needed to dry the cloths is very high... I built a plastic storage on the roof, I tiled the walls, painted the ceiling, put a new small window, I moved the kitchen to the other ventilated side of the house, and I bought a new oven that is smaller than the old one. I restructured the interior design of the house without adding an inch to the house.”

Um Zoher has also made many adjustments to the house to be able to live in it, she narrated, “With the money I saved, I fixed the house, tailed the floor,



repaired the doors and windows, turned the bedroom to a living room to be able to welcome guests in the house, and installed a new window to let more air and sun access the house. I'm still not satisfied with the house but after this renovation I can live and accommodate myself in it." Moreover, Fatima has another renovation plans for her house, she stated, "I'm thinking to bring a fridge and to repair the house because it leaks during winter and to clean the fungus from the walls and the ceiling. I can't afford doing all of this together, I will do it one step at a time."

Women attempt to create a private space for themselves and their family members by placing regulations and order in the house. Siham explained the kind of order she places in the house to make all family members comfortable, "I let my children sleep at the same time, so that they don't bother each other with the noise they create, they know that they don't have private bedroom and they have to cope with this limited space." Fatima also tries to find a private space for her children, she said, "My sons sleep in the bedroom and my daughters sleep with me in the living room. When my daughters change their cloths, their brothers leave the house. I taught them to respect the privacy of each other."

Um Hasan creates a private and tranquil space for herself and her children by using a range of tactics, she said, "I taught my children to knock the door and take permission before entering any room and I tell them not to interfere in their siblings private issues... I don't allow my kids to bring their friends to the house because we don't have much space here... My children don't have a bedroom but I try to create a kind of privacy for them, for example, every one of them has their own blanket, bed covers and sheets, pillows and towels... Also to make them feel

good, I bake cake and celebrate their birthdays and bring gifts for them. All of this will ease our living conditions and eliminate the pressure in the house.”

Um Othman described the activities they do as soon as they wake up to have enough space to be able to move, “when we wake up, we start putting everything in order, we take off the mattresses and pillows from the ground, we fold the blankets, if there are dirty dishes, we clean them and put them in their places, if there is laundry, we wash it, and hang it in a specific way, the big ones to the back and the small ones to the front, as to make our movement easier, then we fold the cloths and put them inside the cupboards, if there are any vegetables or fruits outside the fridge, we put them under the table. During lunch time, I give everyone a plate and a spoon, and I organize them and tell them where to sit, some sit on chairs, and others sit on the ground. If there is no order in the house, we won’t find a place to put our feet.”

### **Income Generating and Money Saving Activities**

Siham seeks different opportunities to generate money to provide for her children since her husband hardly gives her money to spend on the house and the children. She wants to have a job that enables her to also meet her domestic duties in the same time, she explained, “I have recently bought a sewing machine, a woman sends me the embroidery work she produces and I stitch it. I work from home, this way I can stay with my children day and night. Yesterday I went to a career day to look for a job, I met Jameel Samarah, the hairstylist, and he scheduled an interview with me next week. I told him I can work from 8am till

2pm only; I don't want to lose my children at any circumstance. In addition, I frequently participate in exhibitions to sell pastries and handworks to make some money. I also take 200 Shekels from the Jerusalem Zakat Committees, and together with the money I make I do some changes to the house. I bought these beds, cupboards, sofas, chairs, and the satellite TV receiver. I used to wash the cloths on my hands for two years and a half; I suffered heavily, so I bought a washing machine. All of what you can see in this house, I bought it from the money I gather over time, my husband brought nothing to this house, not even a straw.”

Just like Siham, Manal is putting effort to find income generating sources and enhance the quality of her life. Manal understands that her husband's salary can barely cover electricity and water bills and the school tuitions, so she has to work and support her husband in covering life expenses. She explained, “All the renovation I did for the house, I did it from the money I saved. I took many small business courses, and I took a loan to started my own embroidery business but I failed because I used expensive raw materials, so the products' prices were high and I couldn't sell many items, I also had difficulty to store my products since I don't have enough space in my house, so I stopped this project. Recently I have taken another loan to start clothing business. I put a small kiosk in front of my house and I sell nightgowns, underwear, and baby clothes. The risk in this business is to receive penalty charge notice from the municipality; I received two notices and had to pay 450 Shekel each time.”

Um Adam, “I had an ambition that when my children grow up, each one will have a house for his own. I didn’t want them to suffer like I did. Although the municipality demolished my kitchen three times, I was stubborn and I built it for the fourth time, and this way we were able to maximize the size of the house. Then I discovered that the house is not enough for my children and grandchildren, so I have recently bought a house in the Mount of Olives. I didn’t achieve all of this easily; I worked for 37 years in Hadassah hospital as a cleaner, I used to take good salary. My husband used to sell pistachio in a kiosk in front of the house. I search all possible ways to make and save money. When I buy 4 kilos of chicken drumsticks, I don’t cook them in one day; I divide the amount to eat it during the whole week. I’m breaking my nails digging the ground to survive and live a respectable life.”

Um Ibrahim is living with her husband, 7 children and mother in law, she worked very hard to enlarge the size of the house from 25 square meter to 100 square meter, she explained, “Before enlarging the house, the house was really small, if you open the door of the house, you find the toilet in front of you. Back then I had 2 children; I told my husband that I was not going to bring more children if we kept living under such uncomfortable housing conditions. I sold my golden jewelry and saved every Shekel with my husband, I deprived myself and my family and I was sweating blood to renovate this house.”

Um Ibrahim added, “Look what I have here, blankets, I work as a salesperson selling these products to friends, family, and women I know. Moreover, I organize trips for women and children in summer, this way I can

make some money and also take my children to these trips without costing me much money. Out of all these activities, I can make capital of my own. My husband doesn't want me to work but he can't stop me, I want to work hard and create a better life for me and my children. I'm a very ambitious woman." She continued, "I bought the furniture myself, my husband didn't put one penny. I bought it from some money I saved from the health insurance subsidies I receive for my disabled daughter."

Um Zoher commented, "My husband told me once, when a woman works, earns money and provides for the house, she will become strong and arrogant, look high at herself and challenge her husband's will. I used to be a teacher and he didn't like it. He was responsible for the house expenses, he was the leader. So, when she is talking right now (pointing at Um Ibrahim) you can see that she has a strong personality." Um Ibrahim replied to Um Zoher explaining why she uses all of these different money saving and income generating tactics, "I can't depend on my husband, he doesn't know how to manage the money he earns, he wastes it on unnecessary things. So I have to take the lead and manage the household income, otherwise, we won't have one penny in our pockets."

These women are being engaged in waged labor whether by going out to the public sphere participating in the local market or by producing from within their private spheres. What urges these women to do so is the economic need to enhance their living spaces and create better conditions for their children.

Even when women are not engaged in waged labor, they feel responsible to save money and enhance their household conditions. Sana' doesn't work but she

was able to save some money to repair her house, she explained, “we didn’t have much money, this small apartment took us three years to complete it, we couldn’t afford building it once at a time. I collected money from my husband’s salary and the monetary gifts I received from family members during holidays, also my sister living in USA sent me some money and my mother supported me financially every once in a while, until I built this house.” She added, “When the ceiling fell down, I sold my golden jewelry to fix it.”

The tactics women use are very much determined by their life cycle and the kind of circumstances they undergo. Before her husband died, Um Zoher has nothing to do with the financial issues in the house, her husband used to provide for the house, she illustrated “my husband used to bring everything for the house, even my clothes he used to buy it for me. After he died, I faced a financial crisis; I couldn’t pay the house rental. After that incident, I started to wisely manage the money, putting strategies on when and how to spend it.”

All these forms of survival and resistance tactics that varies between finding a refuge, arranging the household, and generating income and saving money don’t insinuate a total deflection or escape from the disciplinary control of the Israeli colonial power but is more like an attempt to re-appropriate the system, the constraining order to their own ends without totally leaving it. According to De Certeau (1984) defiance must not be excessive and these tactical practices are the art of being in between by creating a space for the ‘other’ or the ‘weak’ from within the structural power.

Um Adam's stories can be an example on how Jerusalemite women and families find ways to use and appropriate the constraining order, manipulate events, seize opportunities and "continually turn to their own end forces alien to them" (De Certeau, 1984). Um Adam narrated her own experience with family disputes over house ownership and the action she took to provide her family with adequate household space, she said, "After my father and my uncle passed away, my cousin wanted to take over this house, I went to the Ministry of Waqf and Religious Affairs, they closed the house and took the keys until we solve the issue internally. Every day and night my cousin guarded the house to make sure I don't enter it. One night it was snowing and everybody were sleeping, I took my children and entered the house from the window, and we brought two mattresses and a heater and slept in the house. Next day my cousin found us in the house and he hit my child, I went to the police and on my way someone throw a stone at my head, I took advantage of this assault and went to file a complaint and when the police saw the blood on my shirt, they captured my cousin and wanted to put him in jail, I told them that it would be shameful to imprison my own cousin but what I want him to do is to pledge that he would never assault us as long as we are living in this house, which is mine and he has no ownership rights in it. This is how I was able to secure a house for me, my children and my grandchildren."

Um Adam decided to cooperate with the oppressor, the Israeli police, to actually find a space for herself and her family. Many other stories told by the interviewed women about how their neighbors informed the Israeli authorities about their unauthorized construction as a way to protect their own space and

place also indicate how these families operating from within the colonial constraining structure to create their survival and existence conditions. Therefore, the strength women emphasized on when proudly mentioning all the creative tactics they use in everyday life doesn't really extend to break or destabilize the political power of the colonial structure in Jerusalem

## **7. Support Networks**

This section underlines the kind of formal or/and informal support networks available for Jerusalemite women and their families in times of housing hardships. These networks include relatives, neighbors, governmental institutions, civil society and international organizations.

### **- Friend and Relatives**

Some women concentrated on the value of moral support granted by their children. Seeing their children well mannered, well educated, strong and successful in their lives keep these women going despite the depressing housing conditions.

Siham indicated, "All feelings of fatigue and depression are washed away when I receive my children's school certificates and see their high academic achievement with their names on honor student list. I always tell my children that their education is their weapon, it is the only thing that can make them strong and independent." Um Hasan said, "My daughter is a first year student at the university, I hope she will find a job after completing her education. My daughter



is very kind and caring, I'm sure she will support me when she starts working and earning money." In addition Manal mentioned, "Seeing my children well-mannered in how they respect their grandmother, aunts and cousins and how they behave well with the neighbors and their friends, supports me morally and motivates me to survive and resist life harshness."

Other women said that they depend heavily on their husbands who stand by their sides and are the ones supporting them morally and financially in this lifetime journey. Moreover, they find it difficult to ask for financial help from their daughters and sons even if their husbands are dead and they don't have sufficient financial resources.

Um Zoher Indicated, "I don't ask my son to bring me anything even a bread loaf, I depend on the national insurance subsidies to pay the renting and other life expenses." Likewise, Um Othman said, "I don't like to ask my children to buy me anything. In this difficult living situation, my children can barely support themselves and their kids. I ask my husband to bring me whatever I need." Um Saleh also said, "I love my children and they are kind to me but I can't rely on them, I only turn to my husband if I need anything, he is my life." Sana' also mentioned, "I don't want my children to help me, all I want from them is to dependent and support themselves and this way I will be very grateful and comfortable."

During the interview, Um Hasan received a text message on her mobile from her daughter, she read the message out load, "May God grant you serenity and happiness, give you his mercy and grace, fulfill your desires and dreams, and

may heaven be the eternal place where you rest.” Um Hasan said with tears in her eyes, “Can you see, here comes the support. What keeps me going is to see the appreciation from my children and husband.” she paused and after few minutes she continued, “I can complain about the small house, the deprived life and limited recourses, escape this harsh reality and abandon my husband and kids, however, I decided to be satisfied with everything I have, cope with the current situation and embrace my family and try to create a better future for them.”

Sana’ received support from her brothers when constructing her house, she said, “my brothers helped me a lot in finishing my house construction. They collaborated in the installation and maintenance for the electrical system, in bringing and carrying the blocks of brick and other construction equipment, and in tiling the house’s floor and painting the walls. I still owe them money for the construction material they bought.”

Most of the interviewees seek support from their close friends. These friends can be selected from different social groups like relatives, neighbors, and acquaintances. These carefully selected friends formulate a solid support network for the interviewed women in times of hardship. Interviewees explained how they prefer and feel more comfortable to disclose their private issues only to their best friends. Um Zoher explained, “When I feel depressed I go see my friends, they ease my difficult and lonely days. Unlike relative, the friends you select to be around them and accompany them don’t blame you, bother you, or talk behind your back. I can share with them any story, idea or feeling without worrying that they would blabber about my personal issue.”

On a similar account, Nadia said, “My parents and siblings live in Jordan and I don’t feel comfortable sharing my thoughts and concerns with my husband’s family, so I turn to my friends whenever I need to express myself. I never open my heart to relatives because they don’t like to see me happy, even on Facebook, I don’t have my relatives on the friends list.”

Siham also stressed on the valuable support she receives from her friends, “When I feel very sad I visit two best friends who live next to my door. This friendship helps me overcome the feelings of loneliness and alienation from the community. When my sister passed away, I had to go to Jordan to her funeral and I didn’t have money, I borrowed money from my friend. Sometimes I don’t have bread to make a sandwich for my kids to take with them to school, so I ask my friend to give me a loaf of bread. My best friends are like my sister, I count on them big time.”

Um Hasan also indicated that her friends provide her with moral support, “My family lives in Nablus and with all the checkpoints, it is difficult for me to visit them many times. As for my husband’s family, they are all busy with their life and career; I barely see them in occasions. What compensate me from this is having two best friends living next to me here in the Old City; they are like my soul mates. I tell them everything; whenever I’m angry, I call them, they let me speak out myself, I shout, I cry, they hear me and feel with me. They make me feel better.”

All these several forms of moral support from relatives and friends create a collaborative and sympathetic atmosphere enabling women to proceed in their daily life, face the challenges they go through, and enhance their life conditions.

- **Governmental and Non Governmental Bodies**

Most of the interviewees shared similar dissatisfaction from the lack of support from the Palestinian Authorities. Um Hasan said, “My sister’s house was demolished by the Israelis and no one helped her from The Palestinian authorities. They came took photos of the house and promised to help and they never did, they even gave her a wrong phone number, so that she would not be able to reach them. The Palestinian Authorities are thieves, they have funding coming from different Arab and foreign countries but we see nothing from this funding, not even one penny.”

Sana’ expressed her point of view in that specific matter by narrating the following story, “One day someone called Rafi came from the Israeli National Insurance Institute to examine my house, he asked me if I support the Palestinian or the Israeli government, I told him that we are caught between the two fires of both governments and I personally don’t support any of them because they didn’t give me and my family any kind of assistance in enhancing our housing conditions.”

On the other hand, the interviewees emphasized on the role of nongovernmental organizations and community centers in developing the quality of their life by enhancing and expanding their life spaces both on the physical and

the mental level. The physical level includes the support these institutions provide for Jerusalemite families to renovate and reconstruct for their houses. The mental level includes the recreation trips, training courses, and other networking activities provided for these women and their children to expand their living spaces beyond the material frontier of their inadequate households and living conditions.

Two nongovernmental organizations mentioned repeatedly by the interviewees are The Jerusalem Society for Welfare and Development and The Welfare Association, both of which have revitalization programs implemented in the Old City of Jerusalem helping families living in poor housing conditions to renovate and restore their residential units. Siham, Manal, Um Othman and Fatima benefited from these nongovernmental Palestinian organizations in rehabilitating their houses and neighborhoods. These women also indicated that they applied for construction assistance and waited many years for their turn to come to benefit from these organizations in repairing their houses. Siham said, “I waited 10 years suffering from constructional deterioration and the lack of infrastructure until The Jerusalem Society for Welfare and Development accepted our application for house restoration.” Some women like Sana’ are still waiting for their own opportunity in repairing their houses, Sana’ said, “we don’t know when God’s mercy will rest on us, we applied for many organizations, no one has replied to us yet. We heard about funding coming from Qatar to Jerusalem, we hope we will get the chance to benefit from it.”

Moreover, the interviewed women mentioned a number of community centers, who also support them and their families in different ways, including

Community Action Center, Palestinian Counseling Center, Nidal Center, Abna' Al-Quds Club, African Community Society, Saraya Community Center and Maternity and Childhood Center.

Um Ibrahim and Manal benefited from these community centers by seeking opportunities for self employment. Um Ibrahim is taking a training course on how to make accessories like necklaces and bracelets and after completing the courses, she is thinking to start making and selling some handmade accessories. Manal took project management course and after completing the training sessions, she took a loan and started her own embroidery business and then opened her own clothing store.

Om Othman and her family can't use their house for any kind of occasion due to the limited space, she said, "whenever we have an occasion like an engagement, we turn to Abna' Al-Quds Club and use the available space they have to carry these events. Even when I invite relatives and friends for Iftar banquet during Ramadan, I do it the club's venue because there is no enough space in my house."

In simple wording, Nadia explained the impact of the activities organized by such community centers on herself, "Sometimes I cry, I feel very pressured and depressed without being able to talk about it and express my feelings. I liberate myself from such feelings by participating in trainings, trips, gatherings, or any kind of event organized by local community centers. These activities help me in creating strong network with other Jerusalemite women and to escape the harsh reality that keeps strangling us."

Um Hassan talked about her engagement with community centers and the impact of these centers on her personality, knowledge and skills, “I took many courses on how to deal with my teenage children, manage and absorb my anger, and stay relaxed and control my nerves. Before taking these courses, I used to be very sensitive; I cried whenever someone talked to me and criticized me, however, now I’m stronger and more confident about myself. My friends noticed this change in my personality; they told me that I became a different person. I’m currently thinking to take English language course to improve my language and learn more terminologies and have better English conversation skills and I will become more capable to help my children in their English school assignments.”

Siham also described the various services she obtains from nearby community center, “the community center provides me with legal assistance in applying for the Jerusalem ID card. There is lawyer at the center who is giving me consultation on how to gather the required documents to prove my residency in the Old City. Moreover, I participate in all the different educational courses and awareness lectures implemented by the center and benefit a lot from these opportunities. I also volunteer in the center by delivering many training sessions on arts and handcrafts for other women and children. Now I’m taking Hebrew language course, which will help me communicate with the Israeli officials when applying for residency permits and approve my presence in the city.”

Some women mentioned that they took many educational and training courses on different topics but they want to know how to practice what they learned in income generating activities. Um Hassan eagerly said, “After 10 years

of being engaged in community centers and participating in different courses, it is now the time for me to use the knowledge I have in productive, income generating activities.”

Women are highly involved in different community centers and grassroots organizations. These organizations should work in coordination with each other to maximize the benefits and ensure sustainability. It is important for these organizations to focus on providing these women with knowledge and tools on how to start their own income generating projects. Also to concentrate on how women can use technology to maximize their production from within their private sphere; technology can be an affordable and accessible vehicle to go beyond limited space and the physical siege. Men should be engaged and given the opportunity to participate in such programs because they also need refuge from such highly frustrating living conditions and more tools to enhance the quality of their lives.

It is true that families’ engagement in different socio-development programs would eventually improve their psychological state, however, it is crucial to have specialized psychological consultation programs and services to these families, especially those who suffer from housing challenges and familial physical compression since tension and mental deterioration become intense in such circumstances.

These centers should have research units and programs because they have credible access to the local community and valuable information about their daily lives and ordeals. Their direct interaction with Jerusalemite families and specially



women would help them to aggregate updated reports and studies about the effect of spatial policies and colonial militarism on women's personal and familial lives and wellbeing. And to further examine the connection between spatial politics, family dynamics and domestic violence in specific. Also to document success stories about the role of women during political unrest and their innovative survival and resistance methods.

Finally, this section explains how women's active engagement in different community centers, trainings and capacity building programs in Jerusalem changed them a lot; they are now strong, capable, independent women, who can accommodate themselves and families with the harsh living circumstances, and can find solutions and alternative to enhance their quality of life and resist the Israeli colonial policies.

## **8. The Old City of Jerusalem in the Eyes of Its Residents**

The interviewees talked about the reality of their lives behind the frontiers of their houses in the Old City of Jerusalem and how the city is positioned in their perception with all the symbolic meanings and rough experiences it carries. The interviewees also discussed their vision towards enhancing their life spaces highlighting their fears and hopes for a secured future for their children.

### **- Jerusalem Between Symbols and Reality**

Beyond the symbolic meanings of Jerusalem and the Old City in specific, each interviewee has different view about their connection to the city based upon

the meanings they give to their experience within their unique living settings and conditions. The ideologies, life memories and everyday practices associated with the city evoked specific images and words to their minds.

Some women focused on the meanings of belonging and existence in the city. Fatima said, “People in the Old City are pressured by the Israeli policies. The Antiquities Authorities come every night and do many secret excavations in our neighborhood. The Jews are targeting this area and they have strategies to take over more and more houses and neighborhoods, there are many Palestinians who sold their houses and regretted it. In spite of all the Israeli displacement measures, I would never leave my house, I was born here, my children were born here, and my grandchildren will be born here. I love Jerusalem, the smell of its soil and fresh air. We have no other place to go.”

Um Adam has been living in the Old City for 66 years, she said, “I belong here in the Old City, I spent my childhood and teenage life here, I got married, gave birth, and worked here. Everyone in the city knows and respects me; the black, the white, the children and the elderly. The Old City is our past, present, and future.”

Moreover, some women wouldn't leave the Old City even if offered a better house elsewhere because the Old City is close to the Al-Aqsa mosque, medical care centers, the market, the community centers, schools and other facilities. Sana' said, “Here we have access to everything. If I want to buy anything, the grocery, the butchery, the bakery, everything is close by. If I feel bored or stressed out I can go to the mosque or go for a walk. Also my husbands and sons' work is here

in the city. We can't even afford renting a house outside the city and pay for transportation and cross checkpoints."

Um Hasan's connection to the city and the meanings she gave reflecting on her experience has drastically changed over time. Um Hasan was able to see the value of her small house only when she felt it is going to be taken away from her. She said, "You never know the value of what you have until you lose it. At the beginning I was disgusted from the city and the house, and didn't want to stay there; I hated it. Only when I felt the true danger of losing this house, I started to look at the house as a refuge for me and my family and as a heaven on earth; I started to love it with all its drawbacks. "

Other women don't consider their connection to the city as a very strong one. For instance, Um Zoher expressed her anger from her residency in Jerusalem explaining that the bad housing conditions in Jerusalem was the reason behind her husband's sickness and death. As for Um Ibrahim, she regretted the fact that she invested in repairing her house in the Old City. She said, "I wish I bought a piece of land or a house outside the city as to have full control over its ownership and secure a better future for me and my family."

Siham believes that here life experience in the city is a terrible one, she said, "It is a filthy city with its neighborhoods, people, drug addicts, settlers and soldiers. I don't like the Old City and I don't prefer living in it at all, it is not safe here. The life style, the house, the neighbors, nothing is beautiful or good here. Despite this entire horrible situation, people envy you for living in the Old City

near the mosque, let them come take my house and give me theirs, and then they will only understand our awful reality.

Other women prefer to live somewhere else where they can raise their children in a safer environment. Rania said, “You think it is a holy city but the reality is different. The boys of the Old City are impolite, drug addicts, they keep swearing, I hear the bad words they say and I feel very embarrassed. And at night, you see every one of them smoking cigarettes and holding their mobiles taking with their girlfriends.” Mirvat commented on Rania’s words, “The teacher called me the other day telling me that my child said a bad word at school, I was shocked because we don’t use this kind of language in the house. I’m sure he heard it from the boy in the neighborhood, it is a contaminated environment!”

Nadia can’t see anything beautiful in living in the Old City of Jerusalem; she can only see the constant surveillance and interference of the Israeli government and the neighbors to her everyday life. She said, “If I have a better alternative, I will immediately leave the city.” Um Hasan interrupted Nadia by citing the following Hadeeth, "There will always be a group from my Ummah triumphant upon the truth, victorious over their enemies, there will be no harm from those who oppose them and they will not be harmed until the order of Allah comes and they will be like that (triumphant). They said, "O RasulAllah, where are they? He said, "In Baytul-Maqdis and the precincts of Baytul-Maqdis." Um Hasan looked at Nadia and continued, “What do you want more than this? This is God’s promise to Jerusalemites, he chose us to resist in this land, we should be patient and we should tolerate this hardship.”

The religious connection to the city was mentioned repeatedly by some women. Um Saleh said, “Jerusalem is a sacred city, for centuries it has been the center for the three religions, Islam, Christianity, and Judaism. We are privileged to live here. When I go to the mosque I feel the comfort and tranquility. This city makes us feel closer to God by our prayers and sincere devotion to worship our lord.” On a similar account, Um Othman said, “What compensates me from life upheavals and fatigue is reading Quran and pray in Al-Aqsa Mosque. Jerusalem used to sooth the prophets’ soul, therefore, it will definitely sooth us too.”

Most of the interviewed women have mixed feelings towards her reality of life; this can be clearly illustrated by Um Hasan’s speech. She said, “no one can know the reality of housing in the Old City unless they actually live in it. Even people living in nearby Jerusalem suburbs don’t know our suffering; they might be disgusted from our houses, their entrance and long staircase because our houses are not well structured like theirs. Our reality here is very sensitive, we lack the privacy because our houses are small and close to each other and people here like to interfere in each other’s personal issues. Despite the harsh living conditions, I love Jerusalem! Jerusalem is where my home, husband, children, and my friends exist. It is Al-Aqsa Mosque, whenever I go to the roof and see The Dome of The Rock, I feel amazed as if it is the first time I see it. This house means a lot to me with the humidity, lack of ventilation, mold growth on the walls, and rubbish gathered on the roof. Even if the Jews don’t come to pray every Friday near the house, I feel that there is something missing. I got used to all of

this and all of these feelings are mixed together and creating a unique experience of living in the Old City.”

- **Fears and Future Prospects**

The interviewees demonstrated fears that are linked with housing hardships. These fears included domestic violence, economic hardship, and lack of stability and security. They also talked about their hopes to improve their living conditions by bringing up an educated and aware generation.

Some women called for attention to specific concerns that emerge from the challenges in providing adequate housing space and that constantly occupy their thoughts, including violence and physical and mental health. Um Ibrahim explained her concerns about the violence that her children are experiencing, “whenever my children go outside to play, their cousins harass them, spit on them, spill water or juice from their house’s windows. The other day they hit my son with a belt.” She added, “The lack of space inside and outside the house leads to an increased tension in the house, my kids keep fighting with each other because they are all pressured in this small space. Yesterday my son hit his sister’s eye with a spoon, and now her eye is swollen.”

Um Hassan similarly noted, “My son is an angry boy, he keeps shouting and fighting his sisters and sometimes he can be violent and hit them. If he brings his friends to the house, he doesn’t want his sister to leave the room or even talk or breathe, and this is not possible in such a small house. This stresses me out;

sometimes I try to keep them away from each other to avoid quarrels and tension in the house.”

Fatima lit a cigarette and narrated quietly, “My ex-husband wanted to leave this house and move to Jordan, he hated the Old City and used to make many problems whenever he paid for rent and used to fight with my parents and siblings who were living next to us. I refused and I told him that I’m not ready to abandon my life and my family here, he shouted, beat me, and beat my children. Once he took us to Ber Al-Sabe' (a city inside the Green Line) and locked us in a house there, we stayed 7 months there, and then escaped. My children used to see how he continuously assaulted and humiliated me. My son has suffered from physiological disorders due to these domestic problems. He used to be very violent and to hit his sisters, he went twice to the hospital after a severe break down and mental disorders. So I took him to a psychiatrist and now he is on medication, he is becoming better and less angry and aggressive.”

Manal said without giving much explanation, “My daughter is the only young female in the family between 10 young males including her brothers and cousins, who all live in the same building. I worry a lot about her.” Maybe Reema can better explain what Manal was trying to say. Reema with her eyes wide open said, “Do you think we are not afraid of incest with the limited bed space in our homes and under such deprived living settings and lack of privacy? Of course we are, that’s why we try to figure out some sleeping arrangements that don’t place females and males in the same bed as to avoid such crisis. There are many

undisclosed cases of incest in our community and people are afraid to expose such taboos.”

The economic challenge was also part of these women daily concerns. Manal mentioned, “Sometimes I regret giving birth to 7 children, with the limited household space and economic hardship one son and one daughter is enough.”

Sana’ anxiously explained the economic distress they experience, “We have 2200 Shekels to pay for the Arnona, property tax, and 400 Shekels for the water bill, 700 Shekels for the electricity, 80 Shekels for the telephone bill, and 400 Shekels for the television tax. My husband’s salary is only 500 Jordanian Dinars; I don’t know how we are going to pay for all of this.”

Um Hasan narrated, “The other day my son asked me to buy him a pair of shoes like the one his classmate has, I told him that I can’t afford buying these shoes for 200 Shekels and we can hardly make ends meet with his father’s salary. Our kids place a huge burden on us, a burden we can’t tolerate. The housing challenges, the settlers, the Israeli government and the high cost of living, we just can’t endure all of that.”

Reema demonstrated the reason behind and the outcome of this economic hardship, “Jerusalemites can’t easily work for Jews specially if they have any kind of political activism, and they can’t work for Arabs because there are no suitable and well paid jobs. Nobody wants us, neither the Palestinian authority nor the Israeli government. We are suffering from loss of identity. We keep worrying about how we are going to live and survive. We are busy thinking about small things like if a guest visits us what we are going to serve this guest, most of the



time we have nothing to serve and no money to buy even a bottle of juice. This economic hardship impacts young men who are unemployed and inactive, they have nothing to do in their life, and they sleep in the daylight and wake up at night, it is not surprising that these youth turn to drugs and marijuana.”

The issue of securing a stable housing took a great deal of the interviewees’ attention. Nadia illustrated her thoughts about having a secured housing, “I will only feel safe if we keep this house, my children will get married and find a house outside the Old City to rent it but I want to stay in my house, to be the queen of my house, I don’t want to suffer when I get old, I don’t want to live with my children and be a burden on their shoulders. I want to have my independent private space.”

Reema exemplified her hopes for an independent house, “I made some embroidery work like a large embroidered picture of the Palestinian wedding, pillows, tissue box covers and trays. I put all of this stuff on the cupboard and covered them with a blanket. One day I will have my own house and decorate it with these handmade embroideries.”

Um Hasan talked about her plans to secure her family, “I’m thinking to go and look for a piece of land because here there won’t be enough space for my children in the future. We should plan for the future especially with the limited resources and the lack of stability and tranquility in our life and because when you are in need, no one will help you or provide shelter for you.”

Abo Othman thinks that the only way towards better living circumstances is through liberation and building a sovereign state, he said, “The housing

challenges and corrupted living environment are all caused by the occupation. If you face any problem you can't go to the Israeli police to solve your issues because in our culture this is called betrayal, for example, you can't bring the Israeli police to your neighbor if they assault you and breach your rights. This by itself creates many conflicts and disorders in the community. Ending the occupation and having a Palestinian state governing Jerusalem is the solution for our misery."

Most of the interviewed women believe that a prosperous future is possible only by providing good education for their children. Fatima hoped, "I focus on my children's education, maybe one day, they will work and help me find a better housing." Siham mentioned, "Sometimes while washing the dishes, I go through my children's homework." Rania stressed, "Education is the only valuable investment in this country." Manal said, "I brought 15 educational encyclopedias for my children to read and use for their school assignments and researches." Manal continued, "One time my son asked me why I don't allow him to participate in any demonstration, I told him that he fights the occupation by his education and not the stone. The stone can't stand in front of the Israelis' weapons but education can. What scares Israel is to have a generation of well educated and mature Palestinian youth."

Most of the interviewees also agreed that providing education for females in specific is necessary to secure a better future. Abo Salah said, "Many suitors come for my daughter but I refuse, I want her to get her bachelor's degree and then she will decide when to get married and choose her partner. I didn't receive any

educational opportunity that's why I had a hard making ends meet. Education is the only thing that can grant my daughter independence and strength.”

Om Othman similarly indicated, “In our family we focused on providing females with higher education. The man can work anything a bus driver, a mechanic and any kind of vocational work but a woman can't do that because the society will criticize her and won't leave her alone. Education is a protection to females' future, in these hard living conditions women need to depend on themselves because sometimes neither their husbands, nor their brothers and fathers will be able to support them.

## **9. Jerusalemite Women's Performance**

### **- Roles, Responsibilities, and Wellbeing**

The harsh housing conditions urged these women to be creative in creating a space for themselves and their families, a space where they can find a sense of privacy, tranquility, peace and stability. These women find different tactics to create such space; these tactics are very much shaped by the socio-economic fabrics of their community, starting from their nuclear family, to the extended family, to the neighborhood, and the society as a whole. These women are very clever in how they use every single inch of the house to serve the various functions of the family, how they arrange the furniture and the storage, and how they keep rearranging the limited available space to meet the different needs that evolve through time. Most of these women have high skills in bargaining, negotiation, planning, organizing, management, and conflict resolution. These

women acknowledge that they have a leading and fundamental role in the family and their families are aware of that and perceive the women's role to be a valuable one.

Um Ibrahim said, "I take my disabled daughter to her treatment sessions, I look after my sick mother in law and take her to all her doctors' appointments and checkups, and I do the cooking, cleaning and tutoring. All of these duties put me under huge pressure but I can do it and I will keep going and improve my life."

Manal illustrated, "I don't have one specific role. I'm the mother, father, nurse, social worker, and teacher I'm responsible for everything here. It is not easy to be a multitask woman but I feel very strong, I can do it and I learn from my mistakes and keep improving myself. My family perceives my role to be a very controlling one; they don't usually understand that the discipline I place at home is for their interest and common good and not for suppressing them."

The skills these women have enabled most of them to manage the household income that comes from their own work, the husband's salary, and/or the insurance subsidies. They said that they perfectly know where and how to spend the money, how to prioritize the spending, and how to make some savings better than their husbands who waste their money and can't manage the household income wisely. Therefore, these women have access to financial resources and when they spend money, they are less likely to spend it on themselves and their welfare. The main spending priorities are the household fines and taxes, electricity and water bills, and children's expenses including food, cloths, and education. The household income can barely cover all of these expenses but if they have

some saved money, they would rather spend it to fix the house, bring furniture, or to entertain their kids than spend it on themselves. Um Ibrahim proudly said, “Behind every great man a, there is a great woman. Men can’t manage the household income; they waste money on trivial things. I made my husband, this family and I built this house out of my efforts and intelligence.”

Women also focused on their role to engage their husbands in the private sphere. Manal said, “The father role should be essential in raising the children and knowing what happens in the house. That is why I engage my husband with the household issues and inform him about every specific detail.” Um Adam commented on Manal’s words, “If the husband stays outside the house at his workplace for a long time and comes back at night knowing nothing about the household issues and disagreements between family members, the wife will feel really pressured and alone in this.”

In addition, women feel responsible to protect their children, create harmony and collaboration between them and secure a good life for them. Om Othman explained, “I feel depressed when I see my children unhappy; I will give them my two eyes to make them feel better. I’m responsible on every member in the family, they can’t survive without me, I show them what to do and give them guidance in their lives. Also, it is the role of the mother to maintain strong ties and bonding between family members, solve any kind of disagreement that occurs, and urge them to empathetic with each others.”

Women fear from future conflict on house ownership and possible struggle over living space between their family members that’s why they attempt to

establish a peaceful cooperative environment between their siblings and to satisfy their needs equally. Women understand that as Israeli oppression over Jerusalem families escalates, family conflict escalates, and therefore, family solidarity with each other in the face of increasing Israeli oppression would be difficult to achieve. Accordingly, women perceive that their role is to strengthen the familial bonding against the Israeli strategy that is working to destabilize the Palestinian families in Jerusalem.

The notion of household bargaining rejects values of absolute cooperation and altruism between family members and assumes that cooperation is a voluntary choice that occurs when it results in favorable outcomes and gains for the individual (Sen, 1990). The interviewed women realized that this bargaining process exists intensively between members of nuclear and extended family over house ownership and access to living space. Um Hasan demonstrated, “with all these housing challenges, the limited number of houses and the growing number of the population many conflicts occur, family members would seek to achieve ones needs and self interests even if it will harm others. It is a survival of the fittest.”

Furthermore, these women don't only think in the present time, they also think about the future of their family, if for example her sons are getting married, where they are going to settle and if they can take part of the family house or they have to move and find a house elsewhere. So, when it comes to housing, they think for today and tomorrow to insure the future of their family.

Additionally, women perceive their family's welfare to be their number one priority in life. Um Hasan clarified, "I put my children and husband first, and I deprive myself to provide them with everything they need. If I want to pamper myself, which rarely happens, I would bring flowers, buy new clothing, or go to a cafe with my friends but I try to avoid such stupidity because I prefer to spend money on the children, the house or pay the bills. If I have some money saved, I take my children to Ramallah and buy them shawarma sandwiches and a bottle of coke."

#### - **Between Victimization and Agency**

The interviewed women are aware that the checkpoints along with the separation and annexation wall forced many families to move to live in East Jerusalem within the municipality's borders which resulted in overcrowded housing and intensified family conflict. Also, they are well informed about the legal issues related to the household as a fixed asset taking into account that most of their houses are family houses, where more than one nuclear family lives together. In addition, they know exactly the type of ownership, the rights and responsibilities, what is permitted and what is not, for both their family and other members of the extended family. Also, they are alert to any circumstances that might risk their presence in the household.

These women acknowledge their oppression by the Israeli colonial housing policies in specific, and their suffering from the shattered socio-economic situation in general, however, they believe that they are not just passive recipients

to what's happening around them; they are strong actors and influential women in their environment.

Um Hasan's words reveal how women can be simultaneously victims and agents in their living context. She illustrated, "sometimes I feel powerful, and other times I feel fragile, neglected and useless. When I saw my son beaten by the Israeli soldiers, I felt very weak because I couldn't protect him and I blamed myself that I couldn't save him. I keep convincing myself that I tried my best and there is nothing else I could have done, it was out of my control. I know that I'm a very tough woman and I give my children and husband the strength and energy. You can't believe what I can do! I take care of my elderly sick neighbor, I serve my mother in law, and I look after my kids and husband. No other woman can do half the things I do. My husband told me yesterday, 'we are nothing without you.' To see that my family is acknowledging and appreciating what I do for them gives me confidence and determination."

These women deploy diverse tactics to manipulate and adapt their hostile reality and life spaces that are regulated, restricted and under constant surveillance. Their endurance is not a passive operation, these women attempt to take advantage of any opportunity and turn it to their own ends. Moreover, they make use of kin, friends, community and any other available support networks to build, reshape and improve their living context and dwellings to preserve their family's independence and privacy. They attribute their ability to defeat adverse situations and improve their living environment to cleverness, experience, wisdom, strong personality, awareness, and agency. Their everyday practices and



mobility create the dynamism of the formation of agency and the transformation of reality.

Siham's story can be a great example to how women identify themselves as agents opposing different forms of oppression and exclusion. This agency is not a static formation; it develops over time and life experiences. She said, "I studied finance and banking in a university in Jordan, I worked there at The Housing Bank for Trade and Finance. Then I got married, I took many financial auditing courses to refresh my knowledge and find a job but my husband refused and didn't want me to work as an employee. So, I decided to have my own business, I opened a big tailor shop in my house's basement, I had more than 150 employee I used to make embroidery work and export it to many countries, I was running a thriving business, I bought a piece of land from the money I made. I was living like a queen, I had my own car, and I enjoyed freedom. After some years; I asked for divorce because my husband was sterile. I came here to Palestine and got married, my life was turned upside down. I saw a different reality; a hostile one, no appropriate housing, no family, no friends, no good husband... Sometimes I don't find a loaf of bread to make a sandwich for my children. My husband leaves us for months, without calling or checking on us... If I ask him for 20 Shekels to make food for the kids, he starts shouting and swearing. Now I never humiliate myself and ask him for money, I make money myself... I asked him for divorce but he refused... This winter, I asked him to buy a pajama for my son, not from his money but from their own insurance subsidies, but he never did. I opened a bank account and went to the National Insurance Institute to have the children's

insurance subsidies transferred to my personal bank account but it didn't work because I don't have a Jerusalem ID card... I applied to pay the Arnona, property tax, under my name to have an official document proving my existence in the city... My husband doesn't want to acknowledge my presence in front of the Israeli authorities because it is illegal to have a second wife... after I applied, the Israeli officials came and examined the house, I told them that I have been living in this house for 10 years with my children. I told my husband not to lie and not to deny my presence because they will eventually know... I used to be stupid and weak and to listen to my husband's orders and agree on everything he said but not anymore, I learned how to be strong, how to say no and disagree and do what I think appropriate. I teach my children to be strong and claim their rights just like their mother. The living circumstances don't break me down; it only makes me more courageous and powerful. What doesn't kill make you stronger."

I decided to conclude with sections from Siham's narrative because it gives a comprehensive picture about her unquestionable agency that evolved with the drastic change in her lifestyle between her first and second marriage. She doesn't see herself as a passive individual in such severe living circumstances; on the contrary, she looks high at herself, her ability and strength to seize opportunities, manipulate reality, secure independence, and to be an active agent in shaping her own destiny.

## VIII. Discussion

### **Militarized Spaces, Militarized Bodies and Lives**

Militarization refers to how the militaristic thinking and language is absorbed through the whole community and saturated into state institutions and how it forms a structural violence exercised over individuals' bodies, lives and welfare (Shalhoub-Kevorkian, 2009). This militarization is displayed in the racist colonial spatial policies that serve the Zionist ideology and Jewish nationalist project.

The spatial practice incorporates production and reproduction processes and ensures continuity and some degree of cohesion (Lefebvre, 1991). When these spatial practices are being restructured and ruled over by a colonial power, what happens to the production and reproduction processes and social cohesion becomes a major question.

Domination over land, natural resources and population is the motive behind Israeli spatial policies. The Israeli colonial spatial policies have a regulatory mechanism to manage the entire population of Palestinians in Jerusalem, their production and reproduction process and their social cohesion. These spatial policies are deployed to discipline the individuals' behaviors, interactions, and movement. These disciplinary strategies reflect Michel Foucault's notion of biopower, which means the exercised power over the body and refers to the "numerous techniques for achieving the subjugations of bodies and the control of populations" (Foucault, 1998).

Palestinian bodies represent and embody the political militarization, invasion, confinement and insecurity in daily discourse. The spatial housing policies produce households that lack physical space, safety, privacy, and hygiene. People dwelling in these houses are vulnerable to physical and psychological dysfunctions, they live in constant fears around the safety of family members and fears of losing legal housing and residency status. Their familial ties and community networks are also being shaped by the physical and spatial compression.

The Israeli regime of power constitutes Palestinians identity and psyche by exploiting their demand for survival. It manipulates their desire for sustainability, visibility, and place. It produces and forms a subject vulnerable to the imperialistic domination; “power not only acts on a subject but, in a transitive sense, enacts the subject into being” (Butler, 1997)

The household unit is not separated from the colonized social space. The household space may be isolated from social space by barriers, walls and private property signs, yet it still remains fundamentally part of that space (Lefebvre, 1991). The colonial spatial policies are translated into the individual’s dynamics and experiences.

The narrations of women around the politics of space and place reveal how the Israeli discriminatory spatial power arrangements disrupt Palestinian families’ normal lives. They indicate how their homes don’t provide them with a shelter, it is rather a battlefield, a violent and unsecured sphere. For instance, women talked about the sudden raids by settlers or Israeli occupying forces to Palestinians

homes searching for wanted individuals or to ensure families are giving correct information about their eligibility to social entitlement and are not making any constructional improvements to their dwellings. “In the dominated sphere, constraints and violence are encountered at every turn: they are everywhere. As for power it too is omnipresent. Dominated space realizes military and political (strategic) ‘models’ in the field... the operation of power practical space is the bearer of norms and constraints... As a body of constraints, stipulations and rules to be followed, social space acquires a normative and repressive efficacy (Lefebvre, 1991). Accordingly, in a colonized dominated zone, people’s lives are being repressed and restricted specially when the population is being monitored and observed through high-Tec surveillance systems installed in residents’ neighborhoods and communities. Such surveillance systems gather day-to-day information about people’s life practices and work as tool to domesticate the population. To have knowledge about a certain subject is to dominate and have authority over it and to deny the subject’s autonomy (Said, 1979).

Some women mentioned how the limited access to convenient housing regulated their reproductive plans determining on when and how many children to have and some women regretted the fact that they have many children and that they didn’t take into consideration the limited household space before giving birth to more children. By setting up the conditions of existence, the Israel state institutions don’t only have a domination force but also a formative character upon Jerusalemite residents by maintaining them as subjects in subordination. “Within the colonial and imperial context this wide-ranging notion of a spatial

order is important since it includes not only the spatial divisions at a territorial level but also those at perceptual and cognitive level... we must be insistently aware of how space can be made to hide consequences from us, how relations of power and discipline are inscribed into the apparently innocent spatiality of social life” (Mills, 2005). Therefore, the politicized space doesn’t just reflect but also produces and organizes people’s operations and requirements.

## **IX. Conclusion**

The qualitative data collected in this study exposes the reality of politicized household space in the context of Occupied East Jerusalem. It reflects how the Israeli colonial hegemony reconstitutes the Palestinian household as a security threat that should be destabilized and dislocated.

“Space is encoded and policed/regulated in different ways for different groups of women and men” (Mills, 2005). This study displays how life spaces in Occupied Jerusalem are highly organized and controlled by the Israeli colonial policies. It also illustrates how having limited access to appropriate housing, living with restricted freedom of movement, dwelling in proximity to settlers, soldiers and surveillance cameras, experiencing militarized violence, can have serious implications on Jerusalemites’ physical and psychological wellbeing and their familial and social bonding.

The study presents rich information that introduces the realities of the interviewed women and their families and offers an understanding to Palestinian families’ cooperative conflict dynamics in a highly militarized zone. It demonstrates how Israel’s demographically driven housing policies rigorously impact Jerusalemites’ residency status, deprive them from living in any sense of stability and security, force people out of their city, and jeopardize the continuity of the Palestinian community in Jerusalem.

Women revealed the effort they put and tactics they use to negotiate, resist, and subvert the colonizer’s strategies and orders that tend to eliminate their voices and overlook their agency in the public and private spheres. It is crucial to stress

that the interviewed Jerusalem women were neither inactively engaged nor insignificant passive recipients to the Israeli techniques that are exercised over their households by the colonial state's institutions. They acknowledge the mechanism of power, how it produces, examines, and monitors their everyday lives and how it is manifested in discriminatory spatial and housing policies in the Old City of Jerusalem.



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