



## Trapped: The Violence of Exclusion in Jerusalem

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It's like living in a trap. If I try to dream, they rebuke me: "Remember, remember, you are Palestinian and dreams are not allowed." If I try to object or complain the whole world tells me, "Your history is the suffering of your people, the history of your family has not been registered in the world's memory." I exist nowhere. I have no passport. I am unable to travel or move around. I have no health insurance. When I die here maybe there will be no need for a death certificate. No one is going to miss me anyway... We're insects, human insects.<sup>2</sup>

*May, a 24-year-old Palestinian woman from East Jerusalem*

A boy in Jerusalem.  
*Source: Afif Hanna Amireh.*

In interviews with young Palestinians (age 18-28) from various locations in Arab Jerusalem<sup>3</sup>, images of confinement and suffocation – “living in a trap” – surfaced repeatedly. Young women and men used the words *khan'aa*, suffocation, and *masyadeh*, trap, to describe their lives in Jerusalem and the effects of Israeli policies of exclusion and discrimination. As Marwa, a twenty-seven-year old living in Beit Hanina, succinctly put it: “They’re suffocating us, hemming us in on all sides.”

“Living in a trap” resonated with the everyday reality of passing through sewage tunnels or between unpredictable checkpoints in order to study or work, as well as the existential experience of being treated as “waste” and “disposable” others. Life, birth and death “in a trap” expose the multiple forces and orders of power that generate violence, and in turn reproduce silence, exclusion, and invisibility.

In 2009, we listened to forty-two young Palestinian women and men in locations where they felt they could speak freely, including homes, Internet cafés, hair salons and bus stations. We asked them three questions:

1. What does it mean to you personally to be a Palestinian from Jerusalem?
2. What are the main issues that concern Jerusalemites today?
3. Could you please share an episode concerning yourself/family or friends in Jerusalem that had a significant impact on you?

The responses reveal how Palestinians use silence and the scream, obedience and resistance, tears and laughter, activism, agency and suffering in an attempt to confront and cope with the continuous, sometimes invisible, and often unpredictable racial oppression to which they are subjected by Israel. As I present and discuss these voices, I will explore how these young people experience persecution and being trapped; spatial politics; trapped spaces and places; the breakdown of the social support network; agency and resistance; and the gendered nature of traps and resistance. For reasons of space, I will omit one important dimension of being trapped: economic traps, including job discrimination, discriminatory bureaucratic regulations and licensing, and home demolitions.

## **Trapped: Ethnic Cleansing and the Violence of Exclusion**

This is the story of my little brother. We all have Jerusalem IDs and everything was as normal. But my mother gave birth to him in a hospital in al-Bireh. Obviously they didn’t give him a West Bank ID because he’s originally from Jerusalem. At the time we had a lot of problems going on and we didn’t get round to going to get him an Israeli ID number. And a year later when we did go they refused to give him one... There were court hearings and all sorts of legal issues... Imagine, he’s now eighteen years old and is still living without an ID. If they catch him in the street they have to detain him. He can’t pass through the checkpoint or go anywhere... He has become isolated from people. He



Al-Issawiyya, Jerusalem, February 2012. Sign placed by Israeli army closing a street where demonstrations have occurred. *Source: Afif Hanna Amireh.*

asks you, “Who am I? I can’t study, get married, can’t work or do anything. My life is pointless.”

*Nahida, a 25-year-old from Shu‘fat*

Palestinians from Jerusalem express a strong sense that their bodies, daily movements, and actions are under tight control: they are trapped. Although I will not elaborate on this here, I would argue that understanding the everyday life of Palestinians in Jerusalem requires comprehending the interplay between global and local forces, including the global “War on Terror”, the development of “security justifications,” and the politics and industry of fear, as well as Israel’s policies of ethnic cleansing, the Judaization of Jerusalem, internal displacement, and house demolitions. By learning from Palestinians’ voices we can develop a better understanding of the ways in which trapped Palestinian communities and individuals – as described by some of the interview subjects – living in isolated enclaves in East Jerusalem are not only controlled, restricted and excluded, but also survive and resist traps.

I should note that the timing of the data collection, which was conducted after the Gaza War (late 2008 and early 2009), clearly deepened the interview subjects’ mistrust of the world’s ability and willingness to shield them from Israeli state violence. As one interviewee stated:

The world has fallen silent and no one is acting. This is something ingrained and it’s getting worse, especially in Gaza. And we are here, and it’s all

connected to the Judaization of Jerusalem. And it's given them room to go further. God only knows, there's nothing we can do.

The attack on Gaza appeared in every interview we conducted, in various guises. Some began a sentence with a statement such as, "Just look what happened in Gaza." Others relied on Gaza as evidence of the world's denial of justice and fairness. Significantly, all of the interview subjects from Sheikh Jarrah wondered why, since the world had turned a blind eye to the atrocities in Gaza, anyone would care about the demolition of houses or eviction of families in Sheikh Jarrah. They were also found to be highly critical of the failure of the Palestinian leadership to acknowledge their failings and losses, particularly during the various rounds of so-called peace negotiations. The perceived failure of the Palestinian leadership to pay due attention to people's suffering was found to exacerbate the respondents' sense of insecurity, inhibit their hopes for a better future, and increase their sense of "living in a trap," as one respondent put it.

The feeling of being trapped and persecuted was apparent in an interview conducted with a married couple. The husband said that "I live and feel racism in every act" during the course of his work at an Israeli supermarket. He explained that Jewish employees enjoy various privileges and discounts that are not granted to Palestinians. He also stated that, even if he were to receive the same salary as a Jewish employee, the very fact that he is a Palestinian itself imposes financial burdens and economic hardships. As he explained:

First of all I am married with three children, and the house is rented, not my own. I have a house in ar-Ram, but I have been offering it for rent for four years because of the Wall, the closures and my ID, and because I had to get humiliated at the checkpoints in order to get to work. Instead of leaving the house at 7, I had to leave at 5.

When asked how much moving from his own house to a rented house had affected him he answered:

First of all it has a psychological effect, because I feel so defeated... Second, all the people I know live near my old house... I mean, when I moved I didn't know anyone here, and I really felt like I was in exile.

His wife interrupted, "I got so bored being on my own, not knowing anyone, not being close to anyone." These quotations illustrate how Israeli spatial politics force Palestinians to relocate from one place to another, imposing not only an additional financial burden on the family, but also exacting a heavy social and psychological cost. All respondents explained, in various ways, how their bodies, time and space were controlled by the Israeli military structure. The interviewees shared their sense of being in exile in their own homes, which added to their feelings of frustration,

humiliation and oppression at the loss of the family network and support upon moving to a new house. In the words of one young man, “Maybe exile is better than standing at the checkpoints or being forced to take a place far from your family, and ending up being exiled anyway.”

## **The Experience of Persecution and Being Trapped**

The first story I can remember is from kindergarten. I used to go there on foot because it was close. It was 1989 or so. One time soldiers were standing on the road. They caught me and started throwing me between them from one to the other. I was shaking, totally petrified. I could barely believe it when they let me go. I went to school and as soon as the teacher asked me what was wrong I burst into tears. After that I hated going to school. I was scared to go out of the house on my own. The army even used to storm the school sometimes, and as soon as they entered it I would wet myself with fear. We grew up and went to Rashidiya [the name of the school]. The army used to provoke us all the time and to stop us at the school gate, because they aren't allowed to enter by law. They demoralized us and distracted us from our studies. When I finished the matriculation exam I went to enroll at Abu Dis and I studied there for a while, even though I'm terrified about the future because Israel doesn't recognize it. We're sometimes dependent on Israel in every aspect of our lives.

The above account was given by a twenty-five-year-old man, who further explained:

When I was in high school I would sometimes study outdoors under the trees. Once I had my exams the next day. A soldier came up to me and asked me what I was doing. I told him I was studying. He took my book and sat down, making fun of me. He threw the book on the ground. I complained to the *waqf* office but they just sent me to the Israeli police. The soldier wouldn't leave me alone and didn't return the book until he had made me strip off my clothes in front of everyone.

His interview revealed how the experience of being attacked while studying and his sense of insecurity had affected his every step and every decision, including finding a job, visiting family or friends, acquiring an education and even going to a health clinic for medical care. The same feelings of uncertainty, insecurity and being trapped was also apparent in an interview with a twenty-seven-year-old married mother of three:

You know, they've really choked us. Like when my brother wanted to get married to a woman from the West Bank. He suffered so much with her. Every time they went out somewhere even to the checkpoint he was humiliated

and detained. I mean they block you in your marriage, money, family, even your house. We don't even have freedom anymore in choosing where to live, where to work and even where to study. Put simply, we're trapped.

A twenty-two-year-old man from the same village stated:

My uncle's house is next to ours. They have a building and they were fined 200,000 shekels for building without a license. They have been sent a demolition order and now they have very little time. They've worked on it their whole lives and put all their money into the building. You should see them now. They don't speak to anyone. They are destroyed mentally and financially. They can't sleep. They are absolutely terrified that they might come at any moment to demolish their home or kick them out of it. God help them.

A sense of being incarcerated in all areas of life was clearly apparent in the narrative of a young female history teacher who explained that even the material she teaches at school is controlled by Israel:

Because I teach history you are prohibited as a teacher from adding even one letter [to the curriculum], especially about the history of Jerusalem or Palestine. That also stifles learning, and increases marginalization.

The sense of being caught in a trap, of "trappedness," was also evident in an interview conducted with a twenty-nine-year-old mother living in the Old City. She told of how Jewish settlers had taken over a number of rooms in the vicinity of her house, something that gave her and her family the sense of living under constant surveillance:

A short while ago, when my son was ten years old, he was playing outside the house, and some of the Jewish settlers' children began bullying him. Then a guard went over and beat him. He came home crying, and so my husband and his brothers went outside to see what was going on. They found over twenty Jewish guards waiting for them outside. They got into a big fight. They beat each other up, and they broke my brother-in-law's leg and fractured my husband's finger. They even beat the women and children. They came from all over the neighborhood. The police and ambulances came, and of course they took us all, men and women, to the police station, and held us there from seven o'clock in the evening until two o'clock in the morning. They questioned us, humiliated us, made us sign a guarantee, and indicted my brother-in-law, who had hit a guard and broke his nose. They also took my husband to court and banned him from entering the neighborhood for two weeks. They kept him away from his house and his children, and if he came home or to the neighborhood he'd be arrested. We asked them to see

the CCTV recordings so they would see that it had all been in self-defense. Of course they didn't agree and gave us a thousand excuses. Imagine the terror we have lived with, me and my children. We sleep in the house by ourselves and they're all around us, ready to explode. You wouldn't believe it. My youngest son stole a guard's gun and threw it over the wall when they were in a fight. They were hitting and screaming, girls as well as boys. This is it, either we will die or stay here with our dignity. There's nothing they haven't done, and we have to defend ourselves by whatever means we can.

The experience of living every day under the constant surveillance of Jewish settlers was raised by all respondents from the Old City of Jerusalem. The installation of cameras and hidden recording devices increased their sense of being trapped not only spatially by Jewish settlers, but also by the use of hidden and visible surveillance devices used by the state's security guards. Similar sentiments were voiced by the interviewees from Sheikh Jarrah. Many respondents from this neighborhood expressed the fear of being videotaped or overheard by extremist Jewish settlers, with the support of the Israeli security services.

All but two of the interviews conducted with residents of the Old City and Sheikh Jarrah indicated that the Palestinian Authority was not a source of support for Palestinians, something that exacerbates the sense of being trapped. In the words of twenty-nine-year-old Nadia:

There's no one left in the neighborhood except us. ... I mean, who wants to help us? Israel, which wants to take the house, or the [Palestinian] Authority, which only cares about money?

The mundane power of the architecture of surveillance and colonial rule creates not only a sense of prison, of living in multiple unending traps, but also forges a necro-political situation with an economy of life and death. The fact that Palestinians need to search for ways to maneuver around the Israeli military in order to bury their dead with dignity, and without being controlled by its surveillance regime, is just one, particularly compelling example of the obscenity of the politics of everydayness. As twenty-three-year-old Samir told us:

Even the dead can't escape them. When we bury someone here at Bab al-Sbat [a Palestinian cemetery], they come to see who the graves are being dug for, who the dead man is, and the papers. Sometimes they hold us up for an hour while they check the papers and then let us go on with the digging.

## **Spatial Politics: Trapped Spaces and Places**

A clear finding of the research was that Israeli spatial politics have heightened the sense of being trapped and suffocated among Palestinians in Jerusalem. Particularly harmful policies were the “ghettoization” of Palestinians in small, crowded enclaves following the invasion of Jewish settlers, and the various impediments to their free movement within the city and between it and the surrounding villages. The interview subjects shared several narratives that revealed their sense of being trapped in confined spaces. One interview subject spoke of having witnessed an old man standing for hours in line at a checkpoint. The man had suddenly fallen to the ground, unable to breathe, and in response an Israeli police officer had threatened that if he did not stand up he would not be permitted to cross the checkpoint. Another respondent described the experience of witnessing a woman who was crying and shivering from fear while crossing a checkpoint:

I remember once at the checkpoint there was a woman and each time she walked through the security gate the machine would beep. There was something wrong with it. But they kept making her go through it, and she ended up getting very upset and scared and started to cry. She was in a real state. In the end they let her through but we realized that it was the soldier himself who had been making the machine beep.

Describing the constant surveillance and the oppressive use of closed-circuit television cameras and hidden security devices in the Old City, a subject that was repeatedly raised in the interviews, one respondent gave the following narrative:

Here, just below the house, is an old derelict room that the Jews took over. At first everything remained normal... But then the Jews wanted to put in a door on the other side, which of course threatened to destabilize the upper part of the house. They renovated the room, created a living room and held parties in it. They made a racket and played music, causing friction and problems with the people. And when anything happens there they close the two entrances to it, from above and below, and have planted cameras all around it.

The attack on Palestinian space and the ensuing feeling of being trapped appeared strongly in a description provided by a young man of his sense of being in exile in his homeland. He affirmed that the only way he could avoid being abused at military checkpoints was to live far from his parents, an imposition that heightened his feeling of alienation and also caused him to forgo the social support they offered. Similarly, the attack on Palestinian homes was found to have a profound effect on victims’ behavior and lives. As one young man stated:





Palestinian women watching house demolition.  
*Source: The Israeli Committee Against House Demolitions.*

Our house is number 19 of 88 houses with a demolition order in al-Bustan [a neighborhood in Silwan]. You can't imagine how the situation affects our lives. The last time they sent the demolition orders I had just started high school, and instead of studying all night I would lie awake thinking about what was going to happen to us when they carried out the demolition, where we would go, and what would happen to my father. It really shatters your nerves and destroys you psychologically, more

than anything physical. Something once happened that, whenever I think of it, reminds me of the real meaning of our tragedy. My younger brother had to go to school in the morning, and when he woke up he put his toys in his school bag. My mother asked him why he had done it, and he told her, "Because if I come home and the Jews have demolished our house my toys will be under the ground." I mean, if a young boy fears for himself and his things and he still doesn't understand what's going on properly, what can we say?

The attack on the Palestinian home and space was also apparent in places where large numbers of home demolition orders had been distributed. As one eighteen-year-old man explained:

My house is number 39 in the list of houses issued with demolition orders. In May 2005 a group demolition order was sent to al-Bustan, so we went to court and submitted an objection. And because of the pressure on Israel they came to a decision to cancel the demolition order as long as we didn't add anything new to the building. Our mistake was that we didn't get the decision in writing. Then in February 2008 they sent us demolition orders again to 88 houses, homes of about 1,500 people. We set up a big protest tent on the street and many people came, journalists, diplomats, ambassadors, leaders and senior people. And again, because of the pressure they offered to give us houses in Wadi ad-Dam in Beit Hanina, they aimed to expel us without any loss to them because this area in the West Bank. So of course we rejected it outright. And this whole situation has a huge impact on us. You can hardly bear to speak one word in your own home; you're always tense, anxious and scared. But, honestly speaking, when you think about it seriously you see that there's nothing left to be scared of, because that's

it: it's either us or them. We are enduring everything they do and keeping quiet about it. It's impossible for them to force us to leave.

He added that the simple act of sitting on a chair in the neighborhood was no longer safe:

An accident happened here in Silwan, a bit further up, that makes you think a million times about the situation we're living in. The owner of a grocery was sitting on a chair by his shop door at about 9 o'clock at night when the ground caved in about four meters under him. He spent a week in hospital. Of course it was because of the excavations that are going on day and night in this area. I mean, you're no longer safe to even sit down.

## **The Breakdown of the Social Support Network**

The interviews revealed how the constant and acute sense of uncertainty and helplessness that envelops the lives of Palestinians in East Jerusalem has generated a prevailing feeling of despondency, a fatalist attitude of "nothing works." The spatial violence and sense of living in exile at home even led almost half (twenty) of the interview subjects to state that Palestinians can no longer rely on their own social and community support networks, and cannot always trust even close friends and relatives. It has further fueled tensions between those considered to be protectors or sources of support, such as parents, teachers, judges and doctors, and those whom they are supposed to protect. A number of interview subjects referred to the inability of their own parents to help them in times of crises, or to their own powerlessness as parents to support their children during Israeli raids, settler attacks and home demolitions. Others voiced their distrust of judges and the court system. As one interviewee told us, "They all work for the benefit of Israel, not for justice." Five of the university student interviewees discussed their realization of the vulnerability of their professors after witnessing them being humiliated by soldiers, as a result of which they had become hesitant in asking for their advice, support and help.

A twenty-eight-year-old woman interview subject described her loss of trust in the informal social system and in her immediate social circle as follows:

The fact that I have a West Bank ID has a huge impact on me in all aspects of my life. First of all I can't come and go with my husband easily because I am forced to go to the West Bank through the military checkpoints, and not through the ordinary crossings. This restricts my movement and means that I have to stay in Jerusalem. I have also come to feel that because you have a West Bank ID you're suspect, and that the neighbors don't want to talk to you or even give you a ride in their car. It really damages your social relations.

She further described herself as “unwanted and illegal,” and felt that her neighbors feared being accused of collaborating with her. The narrative of this woman, a West Banker living with her husband in Jerusalem, also revealed how her status had affected her relationship with her husband, as she felt that she had become a burden on him and his family. As she explained, the loss of trust and support from her society, including her own family, had increased her sense of exclusion and depression, and in turn limited her movement and social relations. It “paralyzed me totally,” to the degree that, “I didn’t want to get out of bed in the morning, wake up to get the children ready for school, or even sit with my husband to watch television or to socialize.”

A number of respondents explained how severe uncertainty and fear had heightened their sense of social exclusion. For example, one man discussed the sense of extreme hopelessness created by the collaboration of local Palestinian informants. He stated that when Palestinians, mainly the young and unemployed, are solicited by Israel, accept payments to inform on other Palestinians, while others sell their houses to Jewish settlers, and assist the occupation, one loses trust in everything and everyone. It has made Palestinians “turn against each other”. Another twenty-three-year-old man described the loss of trust in his own community that followed the loss of most of the houses in his neighborhood to Jewish settlers, and the resulting sense of helplessness, disgust and frustration:

Whoever says that the Jews take a house that isn’t for sale is wrong, because it’s all just talk. Even if the people in the house aren’t selling then someone else will sell it for them; it’s our failing, not theirs.

A twenty-four-year-old woman voiced the following criticism of the local leadership, community and family, and expressed her sense of being trapped by internal as well as external forces, through sharing a narrative about a deadly local fight between two families that broke out in her neighborhood:

We’ve recently been living in extremely difficult circumstances, in this area in particular. It’s not just that the Jews have no mercy on us, but that we have no mercy on ourselves and we’re not standing together. The biggest sign is an incident that took place here in Silwan about a month ago when two families got into a fight. We’re creating a contradiction when one day people read in the newspaper that the Jews attacked us, and the next that we’re killing each other.

In these uncontrolled situations of external political violence, global injustice, the denial of rights and internal conflict, both women and men communicated a severe sense of crisis. Crisis is created in large part by the difficulties entailed in determining who is trustworthy and who is not, what steps one should take to protect oneself and one’s family, who to talk to, where to look for work, and what to do if one’s house is to be demolished or evacuated. When theorizing and unpacking such politics of

everydayness, and through uncovering its obscenity, we realize how it caused a sense, in some cases, of actual socio-cide, a severe socio-economic and psychological devastation that leaves no corpses or wounds, but rather results in slow death. This infrastructural warfare allocates absolute power to colonizers, causing the collapse of formal and informal political and economic institutions, and enables the formation of new, more militarized economies, geographies and resources, while also enabling and creating new modes of subverting the system.

## **Agency and Resistance**

In one interview a twelve-year-old child was sitting with his mother as she was sharing her narratives. While listening to her stories of the encirclement of their house in the Old City by Jewish settlers, he interrupted to tell us that he wasn't afraid of the settlers, regardless of their violence against himself and his family. As he explained:

It's they who are afraid of us. When they walk beside us they're on edge. Really, we're stronger than them, and if it wasn't for their weapons they wouldn't be able to do anything to us. On the day the trouble started we faced serious troubles and violence... But now they don't dare do anything to us, because my dad bought some cameras and put them around the house so we would have pictures and videos if anything happened, so now we don't have to wait for them to take pity on us.

Here the boy expresses agency and power, and his own and his family's refusal to accept exclusion as a mode of survival. The rejection by Palestinians of their own helplessness and their willingness to resist was also evident in the narrative of one young man who shared his family history with us. The man's family is originally from the village of Qalunya, from which they were internally displaced. In response to the suffering and adversity experienced by himself and his family he interviewed all members of his family, and recorded their voices on a CD:

We're originally from an area called Qalunya, next to Abu Ghosh. In 1968 armed Jewish militias came and expelled our family barefoot and with nothing to live off. They kicked them out like sheep and moved into their place. So they came and lived here in rented accommodation... When we grew up we started going there to see where our family used to live. I made a CD about Qalunya and about our displacement. I'll give you a copy of it.

Our interview subjects shared many stories of frontline activism. The incidents they describe included someone helping to sneak a sick and pregnant woman from the West Bank to a doctor in Jerusalem, an act that almost cost those involved their lives. Others were about people hiding dead bodies in cars and burying them at Bab al-Sbat,

a Palestinian cemetery in Jerusalem, in respect of the wishes of the dead. Just as they spoke of their daily struggles to reach their schools, universities and workplaces, so they also voiced their refusal to accept humiliation as part of their everyday lives as Palestinians. All the people interviewed related their own experiences of challenging the injustice of the Israeli occupation. One woman discussed her own resistance to the domination and violence, describing it as a daily act of survival:

Once my husband went to pray at Al-Aqsa and didn't come back when he was supposed to. The neighbors told me that the settlers had attacked Al-Aqsa and the police had closed all the gates and weren't letting anyone in or out. And the settlers were on edge... I couldn't just sit there and said I wanted to go to bring my husband back. I grabbed a small hoe that I use for gardening and went to get him. But, thanks be to God, it ended up being alright. What it means is that at any moment when you're inside the [Old] City you can get hurt, and you have no idea what will happen to you.

In response to the threat to her husband from Jewish settlers in the Old City this woman took a hoe and went to confront the police herself. She explained in detail the ordeal of getting her husband back, and stated that she was always ready to do whatever is necessary if and when settlers attacked her family. She concluded, "They have their big guns, all the Israeli police and the military, with all its might... And I have my hoe, and I'll use it if they get near my husband or children."

A twenty-year-old woman shared what she described as "the most painful ordeal":

One incident truly shook me, and I feel it really reflects our fear of the Jews. At the start of the Intifada my younger twin brothers were about ten years old or so. My mother, afraid that the army would bother them or take them away had them grow their hair long, so that when the army came to look for kids who had thrown stones they would think that they were girls, because they looked like girls.

In this case the family's daily fear of attack in the Old City had inspired the mother to come up with the novel idea of growing her sons' hair long, and thus feminizing them in an attempt to protect them from attack by Jewish settlers and Israeli soldiers.

One of the interview subjects, a young woman who is a member of a family that struggled for thirty-seven years with the Israeli authorities to save their house, only for it to be finally evacuated during the summer of 2009, gave the following narrative:

We're stuck with the issue of the house and the courts. A year ago we were just getting out of a financial crisis after adding an extension to the house. It was nearly Ramadan when they came and put our father in prison for three months. Imagine, and it was Eid. It had a serious psychological effect on me; I even fell behind at school. After he got out of prison they came after

us with an evacuation order. It was about 3:30 in the morning when we heard a movement. We went inside the house and locked the doors. Within a few seconds they had broken the glass of the door and the kitchen window. They came in shouting, “Come on, outside!” and wouldn’t even give us time to get dressed. They kicked us out barefoot in our nightclothes. They beat us because we didn’t want to go out, and didn’t let us take anything with us. They hit my brother, tore his shirt and threw him outside. And my little sister – even now no one knows how they got her out of the house, and she still doesn’t want to talk about it... From that day until now we’ve been sitting on the pavement next to the house. We still hope we can go back, but it’s a painful thing to see the Jews living in your house, going in and out, while we’re sleeping out on the street. But I feel that our relationships with the neighbors and the people here have got stronger, especially between us and the families that were evicted in the same area. What has happened might have affected the course of my whole life. I’ve started to think about studying law so I can understand our case and defend our rights. But my dad and I are very hopeful that we will go back to the house, and if we don’t go back, then at least if we stick to our position and remain steadfast that will create pressure and prevent the evacuation of other houses that are threatened. And I forgot to tell you that my sister is boycotting all Israeli products. Even if she was on the verge of death she wouldn’t eat or drink anything from Israel. We saw a young settler on the roof of our house with the Torah in one hand and a gun in the other. We took a photo of him and put it on the Internet. We’ve also approached many international bodies and told them how we’ve suffered and about our problems, and, God willing, it will do some good.

This narrative highlights the various means employed by the interview subject to challenge the violation of her right to remain in her house. She shared how her trauma and loss had empowered her and other members of her family, led her to make life-altering decisions, and strengthened her network of social support. It also provides an example of the use of e-resistance as a mode of frontline activism and a new weapon of resistance in the Palestinian arsenal that unleashes new forces, breaks boundaries, and creates de-territorialized spaces of resistance.

## **Gendered Traps, Gendered Resistance**

One of the major research findings was that new spaces for gendered political, social and economic transactions have been opened up by the ongoing political violence, the displacement and dislocation, the daily trials and arguments with Israeli soldiers at the checkpoints, the need to meet and interact with new men and women, deal with taxi drivers, and other challenging encounters. In certain situations necessity has dictated

the entry of Palestinian women into new spaces, and in turn enabled them to negotiate their rights, seek help and search for service-providers, thereby expanding their knowledge and providing them with additional survival tactics. As a twenty-three-year-old female university student explained:

Their main aim was to put more pressure on men, to increase their control of women and men, but what they got is the opposite. I could tell you about how more girls are enrolling in universities, more women are working in public services, and more women are opening businesses. In my family alone, I could tell you about how my aunt, in her struggle to help her family after her husband lost his job, started up a new business selling pastries. And that encouraged my mother to start her own business making jewelry and selling it to Jewish shops. And all my sisters have graduated from university, are currently enrolled or on their way there. The more Israel pushes and hits us, the more we resist. It is still hard, but we're all proud of our ability to keep our spirits high.

However, as some female respondents revealed, the political violence, displacement, and life as refugees has also made them more vulnerable to violence and abuse, including at the hands of members of their own families. Some women discussed their further marginalization within the Palestinian community in Jerusalem, and their peripheral status, which they said was supported by the local Palestinian leadership. They shared stories of gendered traps in their daily lives. One young woman from the Old City explained how Israel's discriminatory spatial policies and other geo-political and bio-political factors had compounded the economic hardships of her family, and in turn influenced internal gender relations, leading to a curtailment of women's privacy and liberty:

Frankly, when we first came to live here I was distraught because the house is so small and there's no privacy whatsoever. All the houses are close to one another and you can't speak a word without the neighbors hearing you. And there's no place for the children to play. I have a boy and a girl. [*Lowering her voice*] My mother-in-law is insisting that I have more children, but there's hardly enough space for us in the house now. We've thought a lot about renting a house outside Jerusalem but we're scared we'll lose our residency. And no one leaves a house they own to go and rent, especially when they're barely scraping by on the money they have.

The same woman shared several stories of her loss of privacy, including an incident that occurred when she was sleeping in her bed with her husband and her mother-in-law flung open the door calling for help after soldiers invaded their home. She also told us that she suffers from severe menstrual pain, but that she is no longer able to stay in bed now that she lives with her husband's extended family and must always remain on her

guard. She added, “When I need to deal with women’s issues, such as pregnancy, the period, visiting a doctor, or even waxing my legs, I need to do it in secret, like a thief, without breathing. And that really, really bothers me.”

Other female interview subjects spoke of how Israel’s family unification policy, as manifested primarily in the refusal to grant Jerusalem IDs to spouses from the West Bank or children born to parents from the West Bank, had further exacerbated hardships and negatively affected gender relations. Both men and women interviewees discussed the economic hardships associated with the struggle to hold onto their Jerusalem IDs, and the consequent loss of financial independence and reliance on assistance from the family. While the family was found to constitute a source of support for young families, some of the female interviewees stated that their support had also increased the control exercised over women’s bodies and lives. Women shared many accounts of being controlled by local patriarchal power-holders, including brothers, uncles and male cousins. One young woman shared with us the fact that her uncle had once taken her entire salary from her for nine months, with her father’s consent. She told her story in tears, explaining that she had had no choice but to accept her father’s request in order not to relinquish her own and her family’s right to ask for his help in the future. She stated:

I love my father so much, and I’d hate to see him looked down on by the rest of his family. If he had not helped his brother to pay for his medical expenses we would have been shamed before the extended family. My two brothers refused to help out. One of them has his own reasons as his house might be demolished and he’s paying the lawyers to save it. And although I’m about to get married and I need my salary myself, I’m a woman, not a man like my brothers. They can count on everyone’s support when they need it, without having to give up their salaries, even though my salary is very low compared to theirs.

The gender-based suffering of some of the female interview subjects also appeared in their discussions of the need to see a gynecologist, find a safe place in which to give birth, and help female relatives treat their health problems. One young woman shared her experience of being exposed to racism at the hands of medical professionals during the birth to her first child:

I gave birth in Shaare Zedek [Hospital]. At first I wasn’t afraid or worried, but then I began to experience extreme racism. For example, when I asked them for something they shouted at me and wouldn’t bring it to me. But when someone else asked them for something they were nice and calm with them. Before we left the hospital I even saw them giving the Jews gifts for the birth, but they gave the Arabs nothing. I had my second birth in the Red Crescent Hospital. At least they were nice to me, coming from the same place and having the same religion. I think that if we had the facilities that



are available in the Jewish hospitals our situation would be much better and we wouldn't need to turn to them.

This statement reveals, once again, women's sense of being trapped on all sides. On the one hand this woman felt deeply humiliated by the treatment she had received at an Israeli hospital, but on the other the substandard medical equipment and expertise in Palestinian hospitals leaves many Palestinian women dependent on Israeli medical institutions.

Another woman described her experience of being trapped and living under constant surveillance:

[I am caught] between the inability to move about, to visit my parents, the checkpoints, the constant worries about my children's safety, the cameras and security guards of the Jewish settlers living around us and suffocating us here in the Old City, and by our men losing their jobs, their hope of providing for their families, and even losing control of our children's behavior. I, the simple woman, end up getting beaten, abused, and totally humiliated...

A further source of gendered traps that appeared in some of the interviews was the sexual and psychological abuse and harassment of women at checkpoints. Harassment by Israeli soldiers, including being made to undress before being allowed to cross a checkpoint, was found to have increased women's sense of loss of their bodily integrity, and their humiliation and oppression. As one woman explained:

During the Second Intifada the Jews set up tents for carrying out searches at the Gilo checkpoint. They used to hold and search us for two or three hours. The girls would go into the rooms and female soldiers would search them, and if they weren't self-confident enough they wouldn't escape from them. A lot of sexual harassment of the girls by the female soldiers went on. They would make them strip their clothes to search them, but there are girls who won't let anyone search them, so they would be left standing for hours rather than be humiliated, and in the end they'd send them back home.

In another interview a young mother shared her fears for her daughter at the checkpoints:

When my daughter is older and wants to enroll at university I won't send her to a university where she has to go through a checkpoint, whatever it costs us, because of something that once happened before my eyes at the Bethlehem checkpoint. I was going home after a funeral in Bethlehem by bus. There were university students on the bus, including a girl who was carrying a rope, because there had been some activity at the university. She was a very pretty girl. It was raining, and I noticed the soldier giving her a

vulgar look. He got onto the bus and asked who the rope belonged to. She answered that it was hers. He took her off the bus and I got down with her. She started to shake with fear. It was such a shame. The soldier told the driver to go and said that she was going to stay there. He didn't agree to let me stay with her and started shouting. And she was scared stiff. I got back onto the bus, but the whole way I kept thinking about her and telling the driver to tell the buses behind him to pick her up. But since then I've said even if my daughter gets perfect grades on her exams I'm not going to send her to any university where there's a checkpoint.

This story is a striking example of the effect of the gendered nature of militarization on Palestinian women. Experiencing firsthand the harassment of a young woman by the Israeli military and her sense of guilt at not being able to protect her may ultimately sacrifice the education of the interview subject's own daughter. The effect of militarization was also apparent in the following narrative provided by another woman:

As I told you before, I hate the Old City. Girls' lives there are totally uncomfortable. Take me, for example: my family trusts me a lot, and I can usually come and go as I please, but I can't be late. It's a disaster in the Old City if you come home late, because there isn't much light and because of fear of people and drug addicts, and even the army there. It's impossible to be safe.

In short, it was clear from the interviews with both female and male respondents that women suffered from Israel's military politics in specific ways, and often paid a high price for resisting Israeli oppression. However, despite their strong sense of being under attack, trapped and in some cases persecuted by all sides, women nevertheless asserted a strong sense of belonging to the Palestinian community and national loyalty, and described their unending search for justice. Just as they were critical of their families and communities, women also stressed their commitment to Palestinian social mores, which they viewed not only as a source of oppression, but equally as a tool for challenging Israeli oppression. Indeed, both women and men tended to perceive the gendered nature of power within the community as a buffer against the trauma of uncertainty. As one young man stated:

We in Jerusalem know very well that the attack is not only against our homes or land, but against our families, our development and our mere existence. My way of challenging Israel's racism is first by taking care of my family and my girlfriend. I believe that we must help all women to study, work, and be healthy. I look at my mother, and see how much the political situation, the imprisonment of my brother, and the fact that she doesn't even know where her mother was buried, has affected her health. I helped her to make

a small place in Bab al-Sbat [the cemetery], just so she can feel she has a space for her mother where she can visit and pray. Our neighbors here are so supportive. We all help each other when we can, but never get upset if someone can't help. The situation in the Old City is really difficult, and we all help each other out. We always have our eyes open to look out for how to protect the children and the young women on their way back from school if they are harassed and abused, and we're proud of ourselves.

## **Conclusion: Hope in Hopeless Situations**

The present study has cast light on the local and global spiral effects of the politics of racism, exclusion, and surveillance and has shown how they create trapped realities in militarized spaces in Jerusalem, realities that are replete with trapped bodies, lives, families and communities. A general finding of the research is that, living in the fragmented, walled-in ghettos in the shadow of Israel's discriminatory spatial politics, most Palestinians in East Jerusalem have developed a strong sense of living in a prison, where they are traumatized, isolated and cantonized. The interviewees, inhabitants of refugee camps, urban neighborhoods and villages, were found to live with an acute sense of exclusion. In addition to their debilitating economic impact, surveillance, isolation and separation have a specific impact on Palestinian Jerusalemites' sense of identity, self-definition and national, cultural and community belonging.

Respondents repeatedly voiced their sense of what I refer to as "trappedness," which is, I argue, central to theorizing the complex web of harassments, abuses, traumas, and the power relations that dominate the daily lives of Palestinians in Jerusalem. This notion is also the key to understanding the boundaries of racism as exclusion and inclusion, power and powerlessness. The concept of "trappedness" can aid our understanding of the ways in which the multiple forces and orders of power that produce violence intersect, and in turn reproduce exclusion and violence. I use the concept of "trappedness" to understand the forces that are shaping an emerging order of power, but also an emerging resilience and resistance that empowers the colonized and the trapped.

To live in a trap means to live in a space that is incoherent and lacking in any clear organizing principles. Indeed, in the context of East Jerusalem there was found to be a plurality of traps and trapped spheres that retain their own separate logics, but that remain dependent on and entangled within other logics when they operate in conditions of constant uncertainty in specific times, spaces and contexts. To detangle this plurality of traps one must first shed the light on the workings of power in militarized and colonial contexts, and take an in-depth look at the quotidian surveillance over the colonized, and the intimacy of the politics of everydayness. It is also necessary to examine the ways in which individuals challenge such traps, paying close attention to the gendered social and economic "trappedness" of women. It also

requires us to expose the emerging necro-political regime that communicates and inscribes its power over the home/land, lives and bodies of Palestinians.

Furthermore, the study allows us to argue that the terror of everydayness is situated in a process of trapping and re-trapping – a necropolitics operating within the Israeli depthless “normality – that aims at indoctrinating the Palestinian, that there are no limits to power’s ability to dehumanize the other. However, the young women and men in our study clearly voiced a critical consciousness of the raced, classed and gendered nature of the violent political context, as projected in the geo-political space of Jerusalem, which in many cases heightened understanding of their belonging, spaces and roles. Ultimately, their power to reconstruct themselves and their realities with their voices and silence, power and powerlessness, and their profound resilience can be interpreted as acts of resistance. This power of reconstruction often promoted their agency, allowing them to forge new modes of activism and resistance. Their ability to re-envision a better future for themselves and their loved ones, their homes and their homeland, has propelled Palestinians living in Jerusalem to develop ways of escaping structural traps, and this ability – together with their acts, strategies and techniques of combating oppression – has undeniably produced a powerful political consciousness. This consciousness was found to have generated hope in hopeless situations, induced Palestinians to speak out against violence, turned them into vocal critics of the global demonization of Palestinians, and emboldened them to demand their rights to life, safety and a home.

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#### **Endnotes**

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- 2 Interviews were conducted in Arabic; all translations are the author’s.
- 3 Interviewees were from the Old City of Jerusalem (9 interviews), the Shu’fat/Anata refugee camp (8 interviews), Silwan (9 interviews), Beit Hanina (8 interviews), and Sheikh Jarrah (8 interviews), 22 of the interviewees were men and 20 women.