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Urban self-development of a Palestinian refugee camp in Jerusalem

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1. Introduction

Palestinian refugee camps were established as temporary spaces until the Palestinian refugee problem is resolved. However, the protracted situation of the refugee camps encouraged an urbanization process at different socio-economic levels (Bshara, 2014: 14). The Shu'fat Refugee Camp in Jerusalem witnessed a continual process of urbanization accompanied by socio-economic differentiation since its establishment in 1965. As of 1995, this transformation in the Shu'fat Camp began moving at a fast pace.

With settler colonialism as a general frame, I also build on the analysis of Lila Abu-Lughod (1990) in agreement with Michel Foucault (1978) that resistance should not be viewed as an expression of power, but rather as a diagnostic of power, especially in "particular situations" (Abu-Lughod, 1990: 42). Abu-Lughod stated that "where there is resistance, there is power" (Abu-Lughod, 1990: 42). This is a suitable way to study the power of the marginalized or what we may call power from below that is expressed through resistance: the resistance that is performed as a reaction to certain situations; it does not follow a particular ideology; and it is not meant to overthrow the authority, but rather it is a means to overcome precariousness and marginalization.

In our case, it is the Shu'fat refugees' resistance against their precariousness, domination and encampment in deteriorating conditions, as well as their status as displaced people relying on humanitarian aid. Their main goal is to improve their conditions and meet the growing needs of their families without considering national liberation or ending the occupation through their practices and actions. This research has traced the workings of the socio-economic power of the Shu'fat Camp refugees through their urban actions and practices that are seen as forms of unorganized collective resistance. Abu-Lughod's work is important in helping us to present "unlikely forms of resistance" (Abu-Lughod, 1990: 42). Studying Bedouin women's forms of resistance, Abu Lughod diagnoses forms of authoritarian power imposed on women. However, in this research, I will be diagnosing forms of power from below of the marginalized through their unlikely forms of resistance. These are revealed in the unorganized collective resistance of the Shu'fat Camp residents.

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In order to extend the understanding of the unorganized collective resistance, I draw on Asef Bayat's concept of collective action¹ and social non-movements (Bayat, 2013) to explain the different intertwined situations in this study. Although Bayat did not actually define his concept of "social non-movements", the description that Bayat provided for his concept confirms that ordinary people are not passive. In his book *Life as Politics: How ordinary people changed the Middle East*, Bayat introduced the concept of social non-movements, which

refers to the collective actions of non-collective actors; they embody shared practices of large numbers of ordinary people whose fragmented but similar activities trigger much social change, even though these practices are rarely guided by an ideology or recognizable leaderships and organizations (Bayat, 2013: 15).

Bayat defined the ordinary people in his book to include urban poor, women, and youth who struggle to survive, ensure a living space, and improve their living situation.

Shu'fat Camp residents represent an example of these social non-movements in their actions to ensure a dignified life. Considering their collective actions as a form of resistance, we can diagnose sources of power that pushed the camp residents to act, defy and resist the settler colonial regime that left them in marginalization and precariousness. Thus Bayat's concept of "social non-movements" can be an important analytical framework for exploring the collective action of the Shu'fat Camp residents, whether refugees or non-refugees, within a settler colonial context.

2. Brief background and general context

Shu'fat Refugee Camp is located about 4 kilometers northeast of the Old City of Jerusalem. It was established in 1965 by the Jordanian government to absorb the 1948 refugees, who were gathered in the Old City of Jerusalem after the *Nakba*.

In 1967, Israel occupied the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, including East-Jerusalem and with it Shu'fat Camp (plus a number of villages north of Jerusalem), and made it part of the Israeli municipality. Residents of the city, including Shu'fat Camp refugees, were granted special identity cards, distinguishing them from the rest of the Palestinians in the Occupied Territory.

Since 1967, Israel has imposed a discriminatory planning policy against the Palestinians in the eastern part of the city.² This policy created a deep housing crisis, forcing tens of thousands of Jerusalemites to seek better housing outside the city boundaries in the seventies and eighties (Karmi, 2005; Shargai, 2010).

¹ Asef Bayat was not the first to use the concept of collective action. In his *The Logic of Collective Action: Public Goods and the Theory of Groups*, Mancur Olson (1965/1971) used the concept to develop a theory of political sciences and economics, arguing that "groups of individuals with common interests usually attempt to further those common interests" (Olson, 1971: 1). I am not in a position to discuss Olson's theory but I rather build on Bayat's use of the concept as connected with other concepts of concern in this thesis, such as social non-movements.

² More details on Israel's discriminatory planning policies in Jerusalem are available in section 4.2 of this paper.

In 1995, Israel started implementation of the "center of life policy" against the Palestinian Jerusalemites, which stipulates that the Palestinians should prove that Jerusalem is the center of their life in order to maintain their residency status in it.

This policy forced the Jerusalemites, who had already established their lives outside the city boundaries, to return to live within the city's municipal boundaries. The Shu'fat Refugee Camp became an affordable destination for those returnees, who could not afford to live in the more expensive neighbourhoods of Jerusalem. This influx into the camp encouraged a group of the camp refugees to embark on the construction of commercial high rise buildings to provide housing for these returnees, while at the same time benefiting financially. This led to the current socio-economic transformations in the camp and the associated developments.

3. Data and Methods

This paper draws on fieldwork in Shu'fat Refugee Camp in Jerusalem that was conducted on intervals between June 2018 and June 2019. In order to understand the dynamics of the urban self development of Shu'fat Camp, I followed an inductive approach, collecting data, based on personal observations and engagement in a significant number of informal discussions. I spent three months of participant observation at the Women's Center – Shu'fat Camp during the period between October and December 2018. My aim was to better understand the urban and socio-economic developments in Shu'fat Camp on one hand and on the other hand to get closer to the camp residents and earn their trust before I began any interviews. I was aware of the sensitivity of the situation of the Palestinian Jerusalemites, and their mistrust of outsiders; they are often worried that any word they say might be used against them. During fieldwork, I made thirty nine semi-structured interviews with camp refugees, non-refugee residents, officials of the camp institutions, and refugee construction developers. Mostly, interviews were conducted at the Women's Center and many others took place at the homes of the interviewees or the camp institutions. In the interviews with the camp refugees, I focused on life stories. I established a series of open questions to allow the interviewees to bring as much information as possible. I recorded many of the interviews after obtaining the permission of the interviewees. However, some of them refused the recording and I then resorted to taking notes of their narrative. I made transcriptions of the interviews, partly based on records and partly on my own account. In order to protect the interviewees and upon their request, I will be using the data they provided me with anonymously.

4. Construction development in the Shu'fat Refugee Camp

Through fieldwork, it was revealed that the Shu'fat Refugee Camp witnessed two main phases of construction boom since its establishment in the mid-sixties. The first phase took place mainly inside the original UNRWA camp boundaries as of the late seventies and extended through the eighties and into the nineties. This phase was first distinguished by horizontal construction and then a shift to verticalization due to the growing number of camp refugees and lack of horizontal space.³ This phase also witnessed the first initiative to expand the camp's boundaries towards the east in the late eighties

³ Interview with Head of Popular Committee in Shufat Camp on March 27, 2019.

and early nineties. However, the significant expansion of the camp boundaries took place during the second phase of construction from the early 2000s onward. This phase took the form of commercial high rise buildings to meet the increasing demand for affordable housing. This demand was caused by the Jerusalemites, who had been living outside the Jerusalem municipality borders and were forced by the “center of life policy” to return to live in the city to protect their residency status.

4.1. First phase of construction boom in Shu’fat Camp: 1970s-1990s

According to the contacted refugees, before the 1967 war, all camp refugees had similar living standards with no significant differences as all of them lived on UNRWA rations. After losing their land in the wake of the 1948 war, all the refugees received humanitarian assistance and they were obliged to conduct any work that was available to them. UNRWA employed many of them at its facilities but this was not enough to overcome the high level of unemployment amongst them. “*We all were the same.*” This is a sentence spoken by nearly all the interviewees. However, signs of slight socio-economic differentiation could be traced through their narratives as some of them were able to renovate their houses in the camp or build simple walls around them during the sixties, whilst others could not afford this action. This meant that some refugees were capable of investing some money in improving their conditions at early stages of the camp life. Refugees capable of doing that included people who already had employment in the Old City of Jerusalem and maintained that work after they were moved to Shu’fat in the mid-sixties in addition to shop owners in the camp. The refugees who turned parts of their houses in the Old City of Jerusalem into small shops and consequently lost them upon their movement to Shu’fat camp were provided with new shops that UNRWA built for them in the camp as compensation.⁴ These were amongst the privileged in the camp to have a source of income at that time. However, the most privileged were the refugees, whom UNRWA employed in its facilities.⁵ Employment at UNRWA facilities helped many of the camp refugees improve their economic conditions as confirmed by the refugees themselves. For example, a woman refugee said:

*After we moved to Shu’fat, my husband worked for the agency (UNRWA) as a gardener and he was getting JD 75 per month which was considered a large amount at that time, improving our financial situation.*⁶

The post-1967 era in the Shu’fat Camp was characterized by a relative improvement in the socio-economic conditions of the camp refugees. The illegal incorporation of Jerusalem, including the camp into the Jerusalem municipal boundaries, granted the camp refugees a new status, allowing them access to work in Israel and to receive certain social benefits in addition to health services (Hawker, 2013: 11; Karmi, 2005: 7). Access to the Israeli labour market opened new work opportunities for them, while at the same time making

them dependent on the Israeli economy. Like most of the Jerusalem and West Bank workers in Israel, the camp refugees worked mostly in blue-collar fields that do not require an academic education, such as construction, cleaning, and car repair (Klein, 2001: 24). The elderly, who could not work and were above retirement age, received a monthly allowance. The wages of the Jerusalem and West Bank workers in Israel were lower than those of Israeli citizens; however, they were considered quite good for those that were unemployed (Ellman and Laacher, 2003: 10).

The refugees’ narratives revealed the emergence of a real estate market in the camp after 1967. The refugees were renting and selling their houses. The houses were sold or rented mainly to displaced Palestinians in the wake of the 1967 war, particularly inhabitants of the Moroccan Quarter in the Old City of Jerusalem and the destroyed villages of Imwas and Yalo, as they became homeless after Israel destroyed their living places. In the late sixties and early seventies, UNRWA houses were sold for JD 50-70 and leased for about JD 15 a year. As the cost of living spiked and the houses were renovated and improved by the refugees in the late seventies, the prices of UNRWA houses in the camp increased to reach about JD 1000 in the late seventies and early eighties⁷. All this happened without UNRWA’s interference. This kind of real estate sector in the camp was limited to some of the camp refugees, who were fortunate enough to be able to buy land or houses in other Jerusalem neighbourhoods, seeking better conditions and bigger houses. But these refugees who were able to find a living outside the camp were in fact rare⁸. The overwhelming majority of the refugees never left the camp.

According to camp residents, in the late seventies and early eighties more refugees were able to save some money to invest in renovating their houses or constructing additional rooms, wherever space was available around their original UNRWA houses. This was done in order to meet the natural increase in family members. Any additional construction would have needed written authorization from UNRWA (Bocco, 2010: 248). However, not all refugees abided by this requirement. When asked about UNRWA’s response to the expansion of the camp houses, one of the camp refugees said:

*Whether the agency (UNRWA) knew about it or not (the new construction), people did not care and the agency always avoided any confrontation with the refugees.*⁹

Seeking UNRWA’s explanation, UNRWA Director in the camp said that

*UNRWA is not mandated to interfere in the actions and practices of the refugees. UNRWA’s main role is the administration of services.*¹⁰

4 Author’s interview with refugee woman, 85, on January 31, 2019.

5 Upon an agreement that was reached between UNRWA and Jordan and signed on March 14, 1951, UNRWA was to prioritize the employment of Palestinian refugees when employing personnel to provide services in the refugee camps (UNTS N.º 394: 1951). This agreement applied to UNRWA works in the Shu’fat Refugee Camp when it was established in 1965.

6 Author’s interview with refugee woman, 84, on December 26, 2018.

7 The above data and numbers are based on narratives of the camp residents.

8 There is no exact number of the refugees, who were able to purchase land or house in Jerusalem outside Shu’fat Camp in the eighties. During fieldwork, I met two people, who said their families left the camp for a better living in Semiramis and Beit Hanina. However, with the growing number of their families, some of the family members returned to live in their UNRWA house in Shu’fat Camp as they could not purchase or rent a house in Jerusalem due to the deepening housing crisis in the city.

9 Interview with refugee, 67, in 2019.

10 Interview with UNRWA Director in Shu’fat Camp in 2019.

Whether UNRWA avoided confrontation with the camp refugees, or lost control of them, the refugees acted as if they owned their UNRWA houses¹¹.

What power do indigenous people possess to enable them to make changes in their lives? Sociologists agree that there should be resources of power in the hands of marginalized people, enabling them to get over regulations imposed on them (Piven, 2008: 3). So, what are the resources in the hands of Shu'fat refugees? We can diagnose this source of power when we consider that the simple real estate market that emerged in the camp was a form of resistance. I consider this failure to adhere to UNRWA's regulations as one step towards further such forms of resistance by camp refugees. The refugees' action and form of resistance are not directed against UNRWA *per se* as much as it is directed against their own precarious situation that they want to overcome. At the same time, resisting their precariousness is resisting the colonial power that caused it.

I may attribute this development in Shu'fat camp to two factors. The first is the increasing politicization of the camp refugees, especially during the First *Intifada* of 1987-1993, which made them feel that they possessed the power to master their lives and space. As well as the rest of the Palestinian camps, villages and cities all over the Palestinian Territory, a strong local leadership was formed in the camp, representing all the PLO factions, particularly the Fatah Movement under the umbrella of the Unified Leadership of the Palestinian Intifada (Abu Afifa, 2004: 24). The strong presence and influence of the *Intifada* leadership was able to transform the camp into a politically active space¹².

The second factor, which is the most compelling, is the failure of both UNRWA and the Jerusalem municipality to take into consideration the refugees' growing needs of housing as their families are naturally increasing. Asked about the reasons behind the absence of any UNRWA plans to meet the growing housing needs of the camp refugees, the UNRWA Director confirmed that it is a political issue that he has no answer for¹³. These two factors, along with the diminishing hope of return, made the refugees work on proving themselves as people capable of resisting their situations, fending for themselves, fulfilling their growing needs, and getting over the hardships they experienced in their lives.

4.2. Second phase of construction boom in Shu'fat refugee camp – 2000s



Ilustração 01 – Overview of Shufat Refugee Camp. Source: The author - 6 August 2019.

¹¹ Similar developments and changes were witnessed in other Palestinian refugee camps in the Middle East during the same period of time. Despite the fact that refugees do not officially own their houses or the land where their houses are built, informal economies and governance have emerged in the Palestinian refugee camps as refugees sell and rent houses that officially they do not and cannot own (see for example Dorai's, 2011) work on Palestinian refugee camps in Lebanon and their urban development; see also Martin, 2015).

¹² Interview with one of the First Intifada activists in the Jerusalem area in 2019.

¹³ Interview with UNRWA Director, Ibid.

The second phase of the construction boom in the surrounding area of the Shu'fat Camp began in the early 2000s. It took the form of a surge in high rise buildings for commercial purposes that are built on Shu'fat *mushaa* land¹⁴ in Ras Khamis and Ras Shehada hills, northwest and south of the camp respectively. This new construction was meant to absorb Jerusalemites, seeking an address within the Jerusalem boundaries (Graff, 2014: 20-21, see also Alkhalili, 2017). According to Mohammed Muhsen (2019), between 2005 and 2018, more than 200 high-rise commercial buildings were built in the two areas of expansion in the camp. Each building consisted of no less than eight storeys, including about 32 apartments each.

Our argument here is that this second phase of the construction boom in Ras Khamis and Ras Shehada was a direct result of the Israeli discriminatory policies in Jerusalem, specifically the "center of life policy." In the following section, I will focus on these policies that are driven by Israel's settler colonial logic and demographic plans of ensuring a Jewish majority in the city (Bimkom, 2014: 83).

The following aerial maps show the expansion of Shu'fat refugee camp between 1985 and 2018.



Ilustração 02 – Map 1: The Shu'fat Refugee Camp, 1985. Source: Popular Committee in the Shu'fat Refugee Camp.

¹⁴ *Mushaa* land is the Arabic word for "common" land. *Mushaa* land was a system of land tenure in the Levant since the Ottoman period.



Ilustração 03 – Map 2: The Shu'fat Refugee Camp, 2018. Source: Maps Department – Orient House.

According to the above maps, in 1985, construction in the Shu'fat Refugee Camp was nearly exclusive to the original UNRWA boundaries of the camp with the exception of several scattered houses in Ras Khamis and Ras Shehada hills to the south and northwest of the camp, respectively (Ilustração 01). In 2018, we rarely saw any empty space without construction in Ras Khamis and Ras Shehada hills (Ilustração 02).

4.2.1 Israel's discriminatory policies in Jerusalem since 1967

Since 1967, Israel has been implementing discriminatory planning policies against the Palestinians in Jerusalem. Several characteristics distinguish these policies. First, Israel is interested in isolating Jerusalem from the rest of the Palestinian areas for political reasons. According to Nadav Shargai (2010: 6), *“Linking the built-up Palestinian areas within Jerusalem to the built-up Palestinian areas outside of it can only reinforce the Palestinian demand to recognize the West Bank and eastern Jerusalem as a single political entity,”* which Israel is trying to prevent. Second, the eastern part of Jerusalem was left without a master plan with tight restrictions on issuing construction licenses that are costing highly and difficult to obtain; Israel thereby left a large part of Palestinian construction in the city including the Shu'fat Camp area, illegal and subject to demolition (see El-Atrash, 2016, for further details). With this Israel gave itself the right to decide what is legal and what is not in the city according to its goals and interests. This in turn led to an increase in the cost of land, licensed construction, and rentals in Jerusalem thereby causing a deep housing crisis in the city. This situation negatively impacted Palestinian residents, who were obliged to look for alternative ways to meet their own housing needs. As of the

eighties, tens of thousands of Jerusalemites sought better construction and living conditions outside the city's municipal boundaries, where rentals are cheaper and there is more freedom to build without paying high licensing fees (Badawy *et al.*, 2015: 5).

Israel's settler colonial measures and policies in Palestine in general and Jerusalem in particular never stopped. On the contrary, they continued and assumed different dimensions over time. In the wake of the signing of the Oslo Accords between Israel and the PLO in 1993, Israel escalated its oppressive measures against Jerusalemites. The goal was to prevent any possible settlement with the Palestinians regarding the city, and instead pushed towards promoting its demographic plans in favour of the Jewish majority (Shargai, 2010: 6).

4.2.2 “Center of life policy”

One of Israel's means to achieve its demographic plans in Jerusalem was the so called “center of life policy”¹⁵ that Israel began implementing in 1995, thereby forcing tens of thousands of Jerusalemites already living outside the city's boundaries to return to live in the city.

The “center of life policy” does not apply to Jews (BADIL, 2006: 30). It was first adopted upon a high court ruling in 1988, during deliberations of the case of Mubarak Awad, who left Jerusalem in 1970 for the USA for education and returned in the eighties, using his US passport. When Awad applied to renew his Jerusalem identity card in 1987, the Ministry of Interior rejected his application on claims that Awad was no longer a resident of Jerusalem¹⁶.

Again, the Israeli Ministry of Interior started implementing the so called “center of life policy” in 1995 with the goal of revoking the residency status of Jerusalemites living outside of the city as part of its demographic plans in Jerusalem (Jefferis, 2012: 94-96). However, the “center of life policy” proved counterproductive to Israel's plans. Instead of resigning to their fate, the Jerusalemites returned to the city *en masse*. These Jerusalemites did not want to lose the privileges their identity cards granted them, including social benefits and access to work opportunities in Israel. Thus, the Shu'fat Refugee Camp became an affordable option for them (Karmi, 2005: 11) despite its miserable conditions including chaos, crowdedness and lack of services. Thousands of these Jerusalemites could not afford to live in expensive Jerusalem neighborhoods such as Beit Hanina, Shu'fat and Sheikh Jarrah. In addition, the housing crisis in Jerusalem was still serious and there weren't enough empty apartments to absorb all returning Jerusalemites. The housing crisis in Jerusalem is manufactured to suit the Zionist settler colonial project and its plans for demographic change in Jerusalem with the goal of getting Palestinians out of the city and tightening Jewish control. Forcing Palestinians out of their city and displacing them is one manifestation of the logic of elimination and exclusion on which settler colonialism is grounded. Israel tries to achieve this goal with its discriminatory planning policies in Jerusalem. Israel's Master Plan for the city, called “Jerusalem 2020” which was published in 2004 ensures this vision by enhancing Jewish settlement construction and expansion, whilst limiting Palestinian housing construction. However, the determination of Jerusalemites to return to live within the city boundaries posed a real challenge to

¹⁵ HCJ 282/88: Mubarak 'Awad vs 1. Yitzhak Shamir, Prime Minister and Minister of Interior, and Police Minister, May 9, 1988-June 5, 1988. [Online]. Available at: http://www.hamoked.org/files/2010/1430_eng.pdf.

¹⁶ Ibid.

Israel's plans for demographic change. As a result, the Israeli planning institutions were obliged to change the population target in 2020 to 60 percent Jews and 40 percent Arabs instead of 70 percent Jews and 30 percent Arabs as was planned during the seventies and eighties (Shargai, 2010: 5).

This systematic attempt to displace Palestinian Jerusalemites from their city is situated perfectly within the context of Israel's settler colonial project, which aims to evacuate Jerusalem of its Palestinian inhabitants. It is part of Israel's systematic exclusion policy to get rid of the Palestinians of the city, which is represented clearly in the "center of life policy." Although their Jerusalemite identity cards allow them access and free movement in Jerusalem and Israel, Jerusalemites are actually restricted in their movement and have limited options as to where they can live in their city. Israel's colonial policies since 1967 forced Jerusalemites to gather in spaces that Israel is no longer interested in, away from spaces that are intended for Jews. Despite all these restrictions and pressure, Palestinian Jerusalemites were able to resist Israel's colonialist policies to displace them from their city. They proved that they possess agency and power to protect their existence in their city. This was revealed when they took advantage of the legal status granted to them by the Israeli regime itself to return to live within the drawn boundaries of their city. Their action can best be understood as a collective unorganized action to return massively to live in the city, foiling the colonial plans to displace them. This form of resistance is another diagnosis of power that indigenous people possess. It is the power of survival.

Anita Vitullo (1998: 10-11) called the "center of life policy" one of Israel's "social policies" that actually impacted the daily lives of Palestinian Jerusalemites as it was Israel's "means of economic and political control over" the Jerusalemites, along with the Arnona and insurance policies. Meanwhile, Graham Usher (1998: 21) considered the "center of life policy" a reinterpretation by the Israeli Interior Ministry of the law governing residency rights of Palestinian Jerusalemites. He wrote:

In the past, East Jerusalem's Palestinians could lose their residency status if they lived outside the city for seven or more years or took a foreign passport. Under the new interpretation, residency can be revoked if Palestinians fail to produce evidence that "their center of life" is within Jerusalem's municipal borders.

Focusing on Israel's policies of revocation of Jerusalemites' residency status, whilst examining the Israeli municipal policies in East Jerusalem, Ardi Imseis, describing the "center of life policy", stated that this policy is especially harsh because it "applies retroactively and irrespective of the present residency situation of the individual in question" (Imseis, 1999: 1061).

Living in Jerusalem in the past does not grant a Jerusalemite, currently living outside of it, the right of residency; meanwhile, current living in the city also does not grant right of residency for a Jerusalemite, who in the past lived outside it. Moreover, Israel continues to apply tough procedures to make it hard for Jerusalemites to prove that Jerusalem is their center of life with the goal to strip them their right to live in the city. (Ibid: 1061-1062).

In order to prove to the Israeli Ministry of Interior that their center of life is Jerusalem and avoid residency status revocations, Jerusalemites must abide by a list of requirements. According to Nazmi Jubeh (2015: 17), when Jerusalemites needed to register a newborn, apply to obtain an identity card, make changes on the details of identity cards, or apply for health insurance, social security, or pension, they were obliged to present to the Israeli Ministry of Interior a long list of official documents, proving that Jerusalem is their center of life. These documents, according to Karmi (2005: 10) and Badil (2006: 30), included receipts, proving they have paid the *arnona* tax on property, paid telephone and electricity bills and other documents, proving locations of work and schools of children. If anyone failed to present any of these documents, he would be subject to the revocation of his residency status in the city.

The so called "center of life policy" represented a turning point in the life of Shu'fat Refugee Camp. The influx of returning Jerusalemites into the camp significantly impacted the urban and socio-economic situation in the camp and its surroundings.

Jeannie O'Donnell (1999: 44) wrote that the direct impact of this law on the residents of the Shu'fat Camp is that they no longer seek better housing outside the camp and insist on staying there despite its dire conditions. She said that the residents of the camp, in both their status as refugees and Jerusalemites, struggle to achieve a normal life under Israel's discriminatory colonial policies in Jerusalem. As refugees that were expelled from their towns and villages by a settler colonial regime, Shu'fat camp residents do not relinquish their right of return, which Israel has always denied. As Jerusalemites, Shu'fat refugees suffer under Israel's discriminatory policies against the Palestinian presence in the city, which Israel considers as defying its demographic plans in the city.

Omar Karmi (2005: 7) estimated that approximately 25,000-30,000 Palestinian Jerusalemites, living outside Jerusalem, were forced to return to live in the city in the nineties as a result of the implementation of this policy. The movement of the returning Jerusalemites into the Jerusalem municipal boundaries was first witnessed in the late nineties in the area of Kufr Aqab, north of Jerusalem, (see for example Khamaysi, 2013; Dajani *et al.*, 2013; and Saqqa, 2015). The influx of these Jerusalemites into the Shu'fat Refugee Camp started several years later around the year 2000.

5. Discussion and Results

Resistance of the marginalized Shu'fat refugees is not meant to challenge and fight the official authorities, but rather to empower oneself, survive, and secure a dignified life. It is a case of power from below. Marginalized refugees were able to develop bottom up strategies to overcome economic hardships and challenge formal regulations that sabotaged their development. The research highlighted several resources of power that the Shu'fat Camp residents mobilized in order to overcome their precariousness.

The activities and practices of the Shu'fat residents, including construction activities, acquisition of land and mass return of Jerusalemites to live within the Jerusalem municipal boundaries, constitute forms of resistance that diagnose tools of power from below in the hand of the marginalized groups. These are unlikely forms of resistance that are meant to overcome marginalization and precariousness that is imposed on them from above.

Unorganized collective action appeared amongst the Shu'fat residents during the phases of construction boom. It was witnessed during the first phase of construction boom at the camp level after they had entered labour market in Israel and their economic conditions

were improved. The feverish expansion of houses both horizontally and vertically was not conducted upon a specific ideology, but rather to meet the growing natural needs. Commenting on the increased construction inside the camp horizontally and vertically, the Head of the Popular Committee in the camp said that the camp's population is increasing rapidly and the small UNRWA houses are no longer suitable for accommodating large families.

The people want a dignified living for them and their children. That is the minimum of the needs of the human being.¹⁷

The second phase of construction boom, which shapes the Shu'fat Refugee Camp today, presented different and more developed types of resistance, power and economic practices, all of which are unorganized collective actions at the level of various groups of the camp residents. The most prominent groups that were able to change their lives and leave significant prints on themselves, at the camp level and at the Jerusalem level were the refugee construction developers, and the returning Jerusalemites that became camp residents.

Approximately eighty percent of the constructed buildings in Ras Khamis and Ras Shehada were built between 2000 and 2010,

explained Head of the Popular Committee in Shu'fat camp¹⁸. Commenting on the record speed with which all these commercial buildings appeared, a construction developer from the camp explained:

Generally Israel demolishes homes when they are separate and isolated, but when it finds a number of homes, close to each other are newly built, it gets hesitant in conducting mass demolitions, as this will evoke tension and lead to fierce confrontations in the camp. They (Israeli authorities) send demolition notifications, but the demolition itself is postponed and mostly ignored in this case. In order to achieve this result, we (construction developers) try to finish the construction as quickly as possible. This is why all these buildings appeared during the same period of time, and today, after more than ten years, they remain standing un-demolished.¹⁹

His words reveal that the work tactic, based on speed, synergy and density of construction, is used by the camp refugees as a source of power, enabling them to defy Israel's regulations on construction. Here also, the empowerment of construction developers is due to Israel placing them in a tough situation where they need to fend for themselves to overcome the hardships Israel is creating in the way of their development.

The unorganized collective action of construction developers led to several significant results. They became rich whilst the camp expanded and became a central space for those

seeking affordable housing inside Jerusalem. The influx of the Jerusalemites into the camp area to occupy the hundreds of commercial high rise buildings is also a manifestation of the unorganized collective action. They formed another social non-movement, resisting the Israeli plans against them and countering Israel's "center of life policy". Here we distinguish the encounter of two social non-movements that led to the same end, although each had different goals. Construction developers sought financial profits, whilst the returning Jerusalemites sought an affordable living place. The actions of both these parties thwarted Israel's demographic policies in Jerusalem.

These actions are seen as mobilizing others outside the spectrum of the group that initiated them. This is revealed when professional non-refugee Jerusalemite construction developers followed the steps of their refugee counterparts in acquiring land in Shu'fat for the goal of constructing commercial residential buildings. Perhaps they would not have dared to act had they not seen first-hand the success of the refugees in this business and the benefits they accrued without the Israeli authority interference to stop them. This indicates that these "illegal – unlicensed – informal" actions are threatened and can be sabotaged from above at any time. The success of these actions lies actually in "the power of big numbers, that is, the consequential effect on norms and rules ... of many people simultaneously doing similar, through contentious, things" (Bayat, 2013: 21, *emphasis in original*). Applying this to the case of refugee construction developers, whose number is quite small, here again arises the encounter of the two different groups – construction developers and returning Jerusalemites and the strength they provide each other. The mass presence of the returnees strengthens the action of the construction developers that could not have initiated and continued with their work without the high demand from returnees for affordable housing that they offered. Together, their actions were seen as subverting Israel's settler colonial policies. Israel did not consider meeting the housing needs of Palestinian Jerusalemites with the goal of pressuring them to leave the city. At the same time, if refugee construction developers apply for construction licenses, their applications will automatically be turned down. Consequently, they have to act to fulfill their needs. The action oftentimes is not without cost; however, sometimes action is less costly than inaction. For refugee construction developers, inaction means they remain in precariousness and poverty. Meanwhile, for the returning Jerusalemites, it is a matter of calculating gains and losses.

Fieldwork revealed that although they live within the Jerusalem municipal boundaries in the camp area, they prefer to maintain their original address in Jerusalem neighbourhoods, such as the Old City, Beit Hanina, Silwan and Thouri for their legal documents out of fear that the area could be excluded from Jerusalem as Israeli officials threaten, leading them to lose their residency status. This indicates that people feel insecure in their living situation and might be subject to another wave of mobility towards the inner spaces of the city if Israel further tightens its measures against them. Jerusalemite residents of Shu'fat Camp did not hide their fears. In an interview in 2019 with one of the camp residents, he said:

The situation is getting worse every day. Who knows what the situation will be tomorrow if Israel decides to get the camp and its residents out of the jurisdiction of Jerusalem? Where will we go? At least now we are still considered living in Jerusalem. The Jerusalem that they (Israel) decided is for us. If things get worse, I am afraid we will end up living in tents inside Jerusalem.

¹⁷ Interview with Head of the Popular Committee in 2019.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Interview with refugee construction developer in 2019.

I attribute people's fears to several reasons. The first reason might be referred to the semi-legal method in which the land was purchased by construction developers. The land is not formally registered and the construction itself is illegal. Moreover, the method of purchasing the apartments is also semi-legal. Like the process of purchasing land, the purchase of the apartments takes place upon an irrevocable power of attorney, which is legal but temporary and the purchase needs to be registered in the official institutions within fifteen years of the duration of the power of attorney. But since the construction itself is illegal, this registration never takes place. At the same time, the land on which the building is constructed is not officially registered²⁰. This situation keeps the buildings, in which they live, under constant threat of evacuation and demolition any time Israel decides to implement such a decision as part of its oppressive colonial policies in Jerusalem. The second reason is their fear of the Israeli official threats to relinquish areas that remain on the West Bank side of the separation wall. This is understandable. In 2015, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu expressed his intention to withdraw the "blue" Jerusalem identity cards from Jerusalemites living in areas behind the separation wall. Such a decision could affect more than 100,000 Palestinian Jerusalemites in the Shu'fat Refugee Camp, Kufr Aqab and Sawahreh²¹. Although Israeli officials are no longer talking about this, Palestinian Jerusalemites do not forget this as they are aware of the fact that Israel, as a colonial entity, can implement whatever plan it wishes at any time to oust them from their city.

Nonetheless, they have no other choice. They were obliged to accept this semi-legal situation and got used to it as a solution for their original and larger fear of losing their residency rights in the city. For them the cost of losing their residency rights is much higher. When calculating gains and losses, their action to live in these threatened areas is a form of unorganized collective resistance against Israel's oppressive threats. They challenge, assuming that their inaction would bring them higher losses than taking such a risky action. Thus, resistance occurs when the cost of inaction is higher than the cost of action (Goldstone and Tilly, 2001: 183). Moreover, when fear is collective, its effect diminishes and encourages people to work hard to survive without allowing this fear to dominate them, particularly as they are now used to this situation that is also shared by other Jerusalemites, living in other areas that are left behind the wall. This sort of collectivism is an important element in the collective resistance of indigenous people, revealing the power to challenge and struggle for their collective right to live in their city.

Conclusion

There is a tendency in academic work on refugees to regard them as victims and passive recipients of policies imposed on them from above. In this paper, Palestinian refugees of Shu'fat Camp in Jerusalem are viewed as active people of agency, who try to resist their marginalization and make changes in their lives. It was very revealing to trace the urban development of Shu'fat Refugee Camp. The changes that the camp experienced from small and narrow UNRWA houses to the current dense and highly congested urban space provide an extensive picture of the ongoing socio-economic changes that took place in

the lives of the camp refugees since their expulsion from their towns and villages in 1948. After it was a living space for displaced refugees, it became an affordable destination for non-refugees as well.

This paper has shown how urban construction can be viewed as a source of resistance and power at the hands of the indigenous people to overcome the marginalization, imposed on them by a hegemonic settler colonial regime.

In summary, this research diagnosed several forms of power in the hands of the Shu'fat Camp residents, refugees and non-refugees, that served in the achievement of the current transformations in the camp area. These forms of power can be described as the power of seizing the right opportunity at the right time, the power of tactic, the power of big numbers, the power of collectivism, the power of breaking the fear barrier, the power of resilience and the power of persistent existence and survival within a discriminatory and exploitative settler colonial context that is targeting their existence in their homeland.

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²⁰ Author's interview in 2019 with a lawyer from Jerusalem who asked not to be identified.

²¹ Al Jazeera website. [Online]. Available at: <https://www.aljazeera.net/news/alquds/2015/11/1>.

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