

Living death, recovering life: psychosocial resistance and the power of the dead in East Jerusalem

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This article examines death and dying in occupied East Jerusalem. It explores practices and subjective experiences of death, and how narratives of the loss of Palestinian individuals, families, and communities 'give life' to the ones who died. The author (a Palestinian herself) is close to the community she studies, which gives her privileged access to personal stories and enables her to write from an insider's perspective. The study analyses the ways settler colonial power is predicated, not only through control and expropriation of the living, but also of the dead, including Palestinian burial sites. While engaging with, and learning from, voices of Palestinians that have lost loved ones, the author evokes the psycho-political power found (and emerging) from sites of death. She argues that, within the context of occupied East Jerusalem, a significant colonial domination over the dead is subverted by individuals and communities. The power of the oppressed creates new spaces for strength, hope, and building the future, while also offering the potential for inner peace and psychosocial wellbeing. The article concludes by centring on the healing and unifying practices internal to Palestinian communities in times of death and dying. These everyday psychosocial practices offer these communities the tools to create counter-reactions to loss.

Keywords: conflict zones, death, dying, occupied East Jerusalem, Palestine, psychological suffering, settler colonialism, trauma

Introduction

This article presents the findings of a study into the practice and subjective experiences of death, and life following death, in occupied East Jerusalem (oEJ). The objective of

this study was to investigate the emotional and physical experiences surrounding death in oEJ, in order to better understand the personal grieving processes in spaces of conflict, the support systems of these communities, bureaucratic and legal obstacles to obtaining burial permits and travel permission, and the physical barriers interfering with rituals and traditions around death, as well as psychological impact. The study engaged with Palestinian individuals', families' and community narratives of loss, within multiple dimensions, including the rhetorical, spatial, social, political and psychological.

It illuminates how continuous structural violence predicated by the occupying colonial power, not only controls and expropriates the living, but also the dead and sites of Palestinian burial. While engaging with, and learning from, voices of Palestinians that lost loved ones, the study reveals the 'psycho-political' power found at, and emerging from, sites of death. Within the context of occupied East Jerusalem, a significant colonial domination over the dead was resisted by individuals and communities, attempting to subvert the colonial system and create new spaces for power, hope, and building the future, while also offering the potential for inner peace and psychosocial wellbeing.

Palestinians in occupied East Jerusalem: some contextual information

The starting point for understanding the urban landscape of Jerusalem begins with

Israel's planning policies within the city. These have been primarily demographically driven since it unilaterally annexed the Eastern half to the Western half in 1967. Understanding this overarching Israeli imperative is critical to contextualising the situation that applies in oEJ for Palestinian residents today. Figures and studies that analyse Israel's '*Judaisation*' and '*Israelisation*' of Jerusalem have reported that, contrary to international law, 200,000 Israeli settlers reside in settlements that have been constructed since the occupation of East Jerusalem in 1967, as compared to 284,000 Palestinians (United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), 2011). The Judaisation of oEJ is also apparent in the fact that, the massive Israeli Separation Wall (ISW) has physically separated about 55,000 Palestinians residents of East Jerusalem from their urban centre since 2004–5, and 130,000 more are expected to be affected in the future (Khamaisi, 2007). About 3.7 million Palestinians, from the remainder of the occupied Palestinian Territories, are prohibited from entering East Jerusalem without Israel's official approval. This occurs through a permit system, with permits very difficult to obtain. Moreover, mere access to oEJ is controlled and restricted by numerous administrative and physical obstacles, including the ability to use the obtained permit in 4 of the 16 checkpoints along the ISW. A heavy system of surveillance and control over residency is operated in oEJ, in order to obstruct Palestinian access to hospitals and other related welfare, health, education and economic facilities (Shalhoub-Kevorkian, 2010, 2007). The ceaseless surveillance of Palestinians, added to the severe restriction of movement, creates a sense of constant uncertainty and entrapment. In reality, Palestinian residents lack a secure legal residency status and approved building permits, with the result that hundreds of Palestinian residents are evicted and at risk of forced displacement (Shalhoub-Kevorkian, 2012). The Israeli

severity of control over the land has intensified and increased with time, so that today, about 33% of all Palestinian homes in East Jerusalem lack building permits (OCHA, 2011), and about 27,000 homes and structures have been demolished since 1967 (Israeli Committee Against House Demolitions (ICAHD), Key Facts, 2012). Although 35% of East Jerusalem land has been confiscated for the benefit, construction, and development of Israeli settlements, only 13% of East Jerusalem land is zoned for Palestinian construction (OCHA, 2011, Fact Sheet). Furthermore, the Israeli housing demolition policy places at least 90,000 Palestinian residents at risk of having their homes demolished. All in all, the confiscation of land, housing demolitions, the building of Jewish settlements on Palestinian land and the construction of the ISW have been shown to impede collective Palestinian development, shatter their social fabric, fragment their community and remove them from the city as Palestinian residents (Shalhoub-Kevorkian, 2012; OCHA, 2011).

Methodology

The stories shared and examined in this article were drawn from interviews of 15 narratives of death and dying in Jerusalem, between 2009–2012. I collected interviews from individuals, families, and community members in a diversity of locations, including refugee camps, villages, neighbourhoods around Jerusalem and communities in the Old City, in order to investigate the emotional and physical experiences of death in Jerusalem. I wanted to better understand the personal grieving processes within spaces of conflict, the support systems of these communities, bureaucratic and legal obstacles to obtaining burial permits and travel permission, and the physical barriers interfering with rituals and traditions around death, as well as psychological impacts. All interview subjects are Jerusalemites, either born in or around

the city, or have lived there for over 20 years. As I also reside in oEJ, I had the unique ability to communicate with people who remain guarded about the lived experiences that are so often regulated by Israeli state laws. As a member of the community that I study, I retain insight and special access to these personal stories and sources.

The interviews were intended to provoke dialogue about the experience of death and dying in Jerusalem. The interviews occurred individually, or with family members present, in people's homes and within community places. The methodology of "empathetic listening" I used allows for participants to feel that their stories and their ways of making meaning of their experiences are being heard and valued. Empathetic listening also helps to remedy the dehumanisation of Palestinian life by recognising the humanity of the Palestinian experience and by acknowledging the narration of death stories as powerful. Because of the context of military occupation and the security regime over Palestinians in Jerusalem, communities and individuals that expressed their willingness to participate in the study, were included and confidentiality of participants was promised.

The study's sample is a sample of convenience, and narratives of coping with death were analysed together with bereaved families and community members that were present during the process of data collection. The content and thematic analysis was also shared with a group of psychosocial trauma experts. To validate the analysis, I went back to the bereaved families two to three times, informed them about my analytical directions, got their approval of various quotes, and solicited their help in understanding death and dying in oEJ. All names mentioned are pseudonyms, though ages are unchanged. No data were used in this article if I felt it could bring harm to the participants or communities.

This article relies on voices of family members who lost their loved ones, while living

with severe continuous violence, and under conditions of what can be described as social and psychological apartheid (Shalhoub-Kevorkian, 2010). By looking at death and dying in oEJ, the study focuses on symptoms of psychosocial suffering during death. Further, it explores the impact of political violence, continuous injustice and the state's surveillance and control over the modes of dealing with the dead and coping with death and dying. Understanding death and dying in oEJ, therefore, requires a closer look at the impact of both mundane everyday violence and historical injustice, as well as the processes of dehumanisation and naturalisation of violence on both interpersonal and intergroup relations.

Findings and discussion

Living death

Mayar's story

Mayar, a young mother of 24 years and a schoolteacher from Jerusalem, spoke about the loss of her child 18 months ago. She began by saying, *'so, you want to know how we lived death – I'ishna el mot – how we really lived it?'* Mayar's words, along with other stories of death and dying in oEJ, enable this article to highlight the ways individuals and communities cope with profound loss, in the midst of political violence and social persecution in militarised conflict zones. Her narrative allows us to examine that loss, as well as resistance, hope and solidarity, from a contextually informed perspective. Mayar explained:

Nisreen was in the hospital dying, and we all knew she was dying. The doctors told us her body was weak, she was only four months old. I was in so much pain, I couldn't see her suffering. I wanted to be with her all the time, but I needed to prove that I was her mother and I had no legal proof. My only proof was her attachment to me, my breastfeeding and my strong green eyes that she inherited. Her medical condition deteriorated every time

I was away, further proof to the doctors that I was her mother. On that day, a Tuesday, when we lost her, she was fading and showing almost no movement when the hospital workers realised I had snuck into the hospital, illegally. You know, I do not have a Jerusalem ID, so my daughter could not be registered with my ID, but rather my husband's. Legally, according to Israeli law, I was not her mother – do you understand? Nisreen was my first child, but not according to their documents, not according to their laws?

Mayar's experience, the 'legalised' dispossession of her motherhood during a time of profound pain and loss, illustrates how the law pervades and controls every moment and space of the colonised. Mayar's motherhood, her need to be present while her baby was dying, is circumscribed by the Israeli state's policy of evicting and eliminating Palestinians from oEJ. Yet, even while legally dispossessed, Mayar challenges her forced absence, and remains present. She continues:

'The hospital security and the social worker came and asked how I am related to Nisreen. I could not provide any legal documents, no Israeli official papers to prove I am her mother. Only her father was able to show legal proof, so they asked me to leave. It was a horrible feeling to be kicked out of your dying baby's bed because I did not have legal documents that proved my motherhood. The security guards were insisting that I leave. They came four times to ask me to go, and I was begging them to leave me with her. Then the social worker came and did her check up again. I needed to prove, in a language that is not mine, that I am indeed the mother. Nisreen, in pain and moaning with her tiny, barely-heard voice and almost closed eyes, looked at me as if begging me not to leave. Then my husband picked her up, and gave her to me to breastfeed. My milk started flowing out of my breast, more and more, and I brought her close to my breast, hugged her and fed her. She held onto my breast so tight that the social worker stood there puzzled and ashamed.

Nisreen wanted to tell me she loves me. My husband wanted to tell everybody that I am the best mother, that even when my baby was dying, she wanted to drink my milk. I kept her there, while my milk spread all over her little face, her clothes, my clothes. . . these were minutes of silence, of love, of pain, of power. My dying baby, my milk, my body, my husband, our love, our family's power, all registered her as my daughter. . . but she died later. My milk gave her the power to die in peace, the power to show the two social workers and the security guards that our love and our connections exceeded their official papers?'

Mayar's narrative sheds light on the ways that groups and individuals live death, adapt their lives to it and create meaning from situations of pain, fear and loss. Mayar's voice illustrates how in moments of pain and agony, with the support of her husband and community, she transformed a severely painful event – the loss of her child – into an act of resistance against oppression. As her husband Samer explained:

'Even our dying and our dead could not escape their [Israeli] violence, but my utmost respect to my wife's insistence to attend to Nisreen's needs when dying. And to our community's and family's support, both financially and morally; bringing food, helping Mayar sneak into the hospital, keeping my position at work empty although I was not there for over five weeks, all this kept me positive, hopeful that God will find his way to help us.'

Mayar, Samer, and their family's ability to link their suffering to a larger political struggle challenges injustice, and creates new spaces of power, resistance and hope. Their words illuminate how entire communities can persist in sharing and telling their stories of resistance. Their ability, as a family, to stand against the legalised Israeli means of depriving parents of their capacity to prove their parenthood assisted Mayar, Samer, their family, and their community

to cope with loss. As Mayar stated, to *'live death'*. Thus, to *'live death'* is not to occupy a space of absence from life, it is an active and conscious effort to access subversive power through presence.

'Living death' as an instrument of power

'Living death' and transforming loss and bereavement into modes of survival are part of an attempt to define psychosocial actions and reactions, in relation to the eliminatory violence of settler colonialism. In the face of the forced evictions of individuals and communities, Mayar's story provokes a rethinking and reconceptualisation of bereavement. During analysis, I as a member of the Palestinian community, felt compelled to situate my interpretations within the liminal (threshold), yet eliminatory space of the Palestinian community, living within the present/absent violent context of settler colonialism.

Through examining traumatic experiences within the context of oEJ, we can see how these experiences are located within both personal and group histories. Mayar's narrative and Samer's voice reveal how their suffering and loss became an instrument of power. Mayar's power to maintain her hope is rooted in the sociopolitical apparatus of resistance to occupation in East Jerusalem, but she also develops new social meaning from her loss. Mayar drew from her husband's mode of interpreting what had happened to them, her community's support, her neighbours' gestures of respect and recognition of her bodily power to produce milk, as if it produced a new language of legitimacy requiring no official papers nor legal recognition.

By focusing on community reactions to loss of their family members, under a settler colonial regime, this article seeks to uncover Palestinian modes of subverting the colonial system when not only living death, but also *'enlivening the dead'*. By this I mean that the

relatives and the community are not only mourning, but by refusing further uprooting, they reject the impossibility of enlivening the dead (Daher-Nashif, 2011).

Challenging elimination: death, settler colonialism and psychosocial resistance

Death and psychological resistance

Death and dying, within contexts of colonial dispossession, can serve as a site of continuity and resistance, even empowerment. Addressing the production of psychosocial power during death and in loss subverts simplistic representations of mourning and bereavement, and assigns value to the power of life and continuity in death to challenge the violence of historical and present dispossession. Borrowing from Martín-Baró, I argue that Palestinians in Jerusalem exist within a specific historical context, packed with injustice, but also buffered by social relationships and community support. Martín-Baró observes, *'psychology has been unclear about relationships between unalienated personal existence and unalienated social existence, individual control and collective power, liberation of each person and liberation of a whole people'* (Martín-Baró, 1996). He proposed a *'liberation psychology'* in order to disrupt the disparities between individuals, and their social community, within contexts of political violence. A liberation psychology must *'redesign theoretical and practical tools from the standpoint of our own people: from their sufferings, aspirations, and their struggles'* (Martín-Baró, 1996). Palestinian families experiencing the death of loved ones illustrate Martín-Baró's call to learn from and build upon *'suffering, aspirations, and struggle'*. While suffering under a colonial regime, Palestinian communities organise structures of support in order to maintain hope in times of death and dying, as Mayar's story demonstrates. These informal systems facilitate psychosocial support within an otherwise hostile environment of erasure. Through their everyday actions around death and

dying, Palestinians theorise *‘from the standpoint of [their] own people,’* and work towards a liberation psychology centred around sociality, and as such address the psychological distress of death and colonisation through social places. These practices of resistance and survival are not institutionalised nor formalised, and thus not entirely visible for analysis, but are essentially a form of everyday psychosocial support that not only offers healing and individual consolation, but also transforms the local context through action.

Settler colonialism

Palestinians daily encounter aggressive practices and policies of erasure of their social communities. Theories on settler colonialism are particularly helpful in understanding these practices and the ideologies behind them. Settler colonialism, seen as a *‘structure and not an event,’* depends on a *‘logic of elimination’* (Wolfe, 2006). Wolfe continues: *‘territoriality is settler colonialism’s specific, irreducible element.’* The invasion of land is accompanied by a project to destroy the natives’ traces, in order to replace them with the settlers’ social, political, and economic structures (Kedar, 2001; Korn, 2000; Fischbach, 2003; Beshara, 2008). Settler colonisers *‘come to stay,’* (Wolfe, 2006) and therefore the invasion of indigenous territories must reconstruct and reorganise the targeted geography, a process that continuously uproots those colonised.

The dispossessing tactics of settler colonialism fragment indigenous societies across and between borders, attempting to reshape and distort the relationships the colonised have to their lands and homes. Indeed, this psychological, physical and social dislocation reorganises categories and classifications of the Palestinian people. Historically, the concept *‘present absentee’* legally identified Palestinians who, after the establishment of the state of Israel in 1948 and despite their physical presence there, could not prove ownership of their lands or homes.

As a result, Palestinians were considered absent, evicted from their locality and denied the same rights as Jewish Israeli citizens (Maira & Shihade, 2012). The term has come to represent the unique conceptual place of the Palestinians; where individuals are physically present, but socially, culturally and politically absent in a manner that serves the eliminatory ideology of the settler colonial project. Palestinians, in this case, embody a challenge to the colonial endeavour of Israel because *‘Zionism... is based on a settler-colonialist logic of ‘terra nullius,’ or the notion of an empty land that has to be populated and civilised, that required the erasure of the Palestinians inside the newly created state of Israel’* (Maira & Shihade, 2012). Analysing this ideology from the standpoint of Mayar’s voice and her tragedy, and borrowing from the analytical directions suggested by the concept of *‘present/absent,’* Palestinians living death in the context of oEJ is one of necessary disappearance, of being always already disappeared, in order to fulfill the mythology of *‘terra nullius.’* The author’s analysis, informed by Mayar’s articulation and through listening to her power to live her loss, seeks to challenge the machinery of surveillance and the present/absent logic enabling the continuous dispossession of living and dying Palestinians in their homeland.

Presence/absence in East Jerusalem

Since the 1967 War, the Israeli state has practiced an aggressive policy of *‘Judaising’* East Jerusalem by evicting Palestinian residents and creating Jewish-only settlements. Thus, as Palestinian Jerusalemites interfere with the myth of *‘terra nullius,’* their physical, cultural, and historical presence in East Jerusalem must be erased and eliminated. Due to construction of the wall, the numerous checkpoints around East Jerusalem and between East Jerusalem and the West Bank, as well as the tenuous nature of holding a Jerusalem ID card, Palestinians in Jerusalem

are present/absent, in that they occupy spaces of 'inside/outside, visible/invisible, internal/external, indigenous/inauthentic' (Maira & Shihade, 2012). While Palestinian Jerusalemites remain very much at the heart of their homeland, they live under constant fear of home demolitions and under the threat of Israel revoking their residency rights to East Jerusalem. Losing these rights and losing their homes is one mode of 'making absent' that is central to the colonising project. Israel's legal system actively participates in this historical erasure of Arab Palestinian space. For example, one recent ruling allows the construction of a 'Museum of Tolerance' on one of the oldest Arab graveyards in East Jerusalem (Mamilla Cemetery), while at the same time another ruling prevents the burial of Palestinians in another historic cemetery in the Old City. This 'demolition in order to rebuild' (Wolfe, 2006) penetrates the daily realities of Palestinians, causing further suffering and loss.

The anxiety of living present/absent and the displacement and uncertainty of everyday life is accompanied by the psychosocial losses of navigating both the checkpoints and Israel's military occupation of East Jerusalem and the West Bank. Structural and continuous violence over the living and the dead of Palestinians in Jerusalem requires a closer look at their psychosocial realities, including bottom up modes of coping with loss and dealing with bereavement, both at an individual level, but also through collective forms of resistance.

Staying rooted

Salim (32):

'I noticed that they had constructed a new checkpoint at the entrance of the village, preventing my relatives from going to the old city. They knew that [my relatives] all wanted to meet us in the graveyard... So, they stopped us all. It was a harsh situation, I felt such an uprooting... My baby daughter was in my hands (dead), and the graveyard was in front

of my eyes, but they stopped us all from reaching there. They wanted me to bury her any place, in any hole in the village. . . I refused. . . They had killed her with their tear-gas bombs, and now they want [ed] to kill her once more with their restrictions on movements. The entire village stood by me, and we all walked towards the checkpoint, after four hours. . . They surrendered, and allowed us to go to the graveyard we wanted for her.'

In listening to Salim's story about the political violence of being stopped, all the while holding the dead body of his baby daughter, we hear the live power of the dead to haunt those who perpetuate the military occupation. Salim's defiance of the structural violence of Israeli militarism is supported by his community's commitment to life in death, in both silence and with their actions, as they walk towards the graveyard. Salim's story of his baby's death and burial reflects the ways that death can engender further resistance and maintain presence. Despite suffering the tragic loss of his child, Salim and his community remain committed to honouring her. The collective journey to the graveyard and challenging the soldiers' refusal also challenges the 'uprooting' of this community. Salim and the members of his village refused to be made absent by the soldiers, they stood their ground and succeeded in burying his child in the village's graveyard.

In the midst of the loss of his daughter, Salim and his community's actions were turned into reminders of a history of injustice and uprooting. Their refusal to accept the Israeli-sanctioned burial site and the collective walk towards the cemetery of their choosing demonstrates that this community refused to be categorised as unseen and absent, without agency over their rituals and mourning. The collective act of refusing to be absent when physically present, and challenging their status of being 'the other' morally problematises loss and death in oEJ. These community actions reveal that

Palestinians are well aware of the political forces continuing to cast them as unwanted others and present/absent. Their acts of giving life to a community that is facing violent erasure, within the everyday condition of loss, illustrates a joint temporality of a historical and present condition of injustice that aims at constituting a better future, and is part of maintaining some level of psychosocial wellbeing. Surviving loss, by refusing further uprooting, rejects the impossibility of enlivening the dead (Daher-Nashif, 2011), and guarantees the community's ability to live through death. These acts of solidarity serve to unite the community, preventing political schisms that inevitably arise under decades of colonial control. The actions allow community members to feel they are not only mourning adequately, but also through their actions transforming the society that, at least to some degree, continues to traumatise them.

The dead speak back

Nuhad (48):

My husband was in prison, and he suffered a lot and was hoping to be released earlier. In his last days before he died, he was very sick and wanted to be with us before it was too late, but Simon (the prison guard), told him that he will leave prison only in a black bag—as a dead body. The nurse in the hospital told my husband that he could file a complaint against the prison guard, and he did, but he died four days afterward. . . . When they sent his body, I wanted it free. . . .out of the black bag... that they use to wrap dead prisoners. I knew what he wanted us to do. . . .I knew he wanted to see me and to tell me he is free now. When he was in prison, he was worried that when he would be released, he wouldn't be able to handle the heat in our house, so I told him that we managed to buy a small air conditioner and he will be released and enjoy that room very much. So, when he died, we washed him and wrapped him in a white coffin. I saw his face, he was happy that it is not that black

bag. I told them all that he wanted to be in the air-conditioned room and we brought him there and let him enjoy the room. . . .We all stayed with him there. . . .and enjoyed him and he was happy. . . .he even squeezed my hand to express his contentment. The entire society, everybody, came to see him in that nice room. . . .as if he was really alive and free.'

While the prison guard's promise is realised, Nuhad challenges the oppressive nature of the threat and transforms the coldness of her husband's death in prison into an opportunity to care for him and provide comfort after his death.

'When we managed to get him home, all the people came. . . .political leaders, Abu Mazen's [Mahmoud Abbas, the head of the Palestinian Authority] assistants, representatives of political parties and many people I have never met. The community cooked and fed all the mourners. . . .I felt that some individuals were jealous that he [her husband] got so much attention and was so loved and respected. His death and his loss made them all want to continue his struggle, his cause, his aim. . . .They all promised that his death would push all Palestinians to never surrender. . . .This is exactly what he wanted. . . .what he told us. His death was filled with hope and power. . . .You could feel it in the air, in the amount of participants, in the house. . . .Even when the military people told us that we should bury him at night. . . .They made my son sign a paper committing to bury him at night. . . .Even then, I heard him. . . .Yes, I heard him asking me not to allow them to do so. . . .He wanted to be buried in the sun, in the daylight. . . .I told my son, and he asked the politicians to respect his father's will to be buried in the daylight. All the community walked with us. . . .His funeral was like a wedding, very big, very respectful.'

Nuhad finds life in her husband's death because his funeral holds the sentiments and desires of the community, the political

struggle, and the social structures of resistance and survival. His body experiences liberation – from prison, from occupation, from colonial oppression – and thus the community and his family experience a psychological liberation through his physical transformation from the black bag to the white coffin, from the confines of incarceration to the comfort of his own home. The funeral transforms into a ‘wedding,’ mourning becomes a celebration, a celebration of *presence*, despite and because of death. Nuhad’s husband, even after his death, ‘*speaks back*’ to his experience of incarceration while alive. As she tells us; ‘*Even then, I heard him. . . He wanted to be buried in the sun, in the daylight. . .*’ The traumas of the living can be remedied, healed. Even after loved ones have died, their desires can be fulfilled and are fulfilled by their families and communities. While these are painful moments for Nuhad and her family, the funeral also becomes an event of solidarity where the community asserts its presence and persistence and provides her with some sense of psychological comfort.

Resisting displacement in life and death

Maysoon (38)

‘I got up, took a shower, dressed, and told all those in my house [over 50 people at the time] that he will be buried where he deserves to be, he will be buried. . . in the old city. . . close to home. . . I won’t allow them to displace us while dead [Yshattituni bil mamat].

I was with him in the ambulance, and I told the soldier who opened the ambulance door that he is in great pain, that he is fainting and waking up.

I cried and begged him to allow us to pass. . . fast. . . fast. . . to save his life. I told him, I am his mother, I gave birth to him. . . And I can’t allow him to depart. . . that he is too young to leave me. . . that I must save him. . . And I did bring him back home, to me,

to a place that I can visit, walk daily to. . . and preserve. I saved him from being deprived of a proper burial. . . And I am happy I did that.’

The commitment to a proper burial, for both Maysoon and Nuhad, brings their loved ones back to life, which in turn allows them to experience more feelings, such as hope, peace of mind and the overcoming of the structures of occupation circumscribing their everyday lives, rather than just those of permanent loss. Burying her son in the Old City, Maysoon resists the ‘*displacement of the dead*,’ contesting the persistent efforts at erasure. Maysoon chooses to engage in a subversive act so that she does not only find defeat and despair in her son’s death. Looking back on her tragedy, Maysoon can also feel pride in her ability to resist total control of the coloniser and bring justice to her son, even in death. These seemingly small moments of defiance become elements of a larger assemblage of social resilience holding Palestinian communities together, and each small act of resistance contributes to a feeling that they are playing their role in transforming society.

The dispossessed write back

Naela (34):

‘When my mother died, I knew she wanted us to mention that she was born in Lifta [a Palestinian village from where its inhabitants were displaced in 1948]. . . So I made them add this in the newspaper’s announcement. . . and, as you saw. . . All the Liftawiyyeh [people of Lifta] came to pay their last respects and participate in my mother’s funeral.’

Obituaries in local newspapers not only offer information about loss, but are also a site of community resistance and carry messages of hope and presence, despite policies of eviction or displacement. Notifying the community of death enables an opportunity to meet, reconnect and remember. Remembering lost loved ones in occupied Jerusalem fosters a

connection, back to both the historical and the continued feelings of loss that Palestinians feel about their physical homes and homeland. While the notice of death holds typical information found in an obituary, the place of birth of the dead is often included as well. For the oEJ residents born in historic Palestine, before the state of Israel was established, the act of writing the name of their villages in their loved ones' obituaries in a sense reclaims the seemingly disappeared places that the Israeli project sought to erase and destroy in 1948. By invoking the name of the village or city of birth, be it Haifa, Yaffa, Lifta, Sandala, etc., in a newspaper read by the community, as well as accessible to those in power, Palestinian families are always reminded of the loss of their homeland, of the continuous injustice and the violence of colonisation. By noting the place of birth, they preserve the 'living' power of the dispossessed and reclaim confiscated places now under colonial control. Mentioning the names of spaces, sometimes even before the name of the dead, reclaims their rights, their connections, their mourning, their belonging and bonds to spaces and times that are within them. They become relinked to their names and memory, collectivity and families, and thus will never be forgotten. The public nature of the obituaries in local papers signifies the community's commitment to telling their truths publicly, claiming their historic homeland in defiance of Israel's policies to deny their belonging. This defiance might allow some family members to constructively 'make peace' with the loss of their loved ones, because it reinforces a sense of belonging so threatened by the coloniser.

Protecting our rights to be buried in Jerusalem

Samir (40):

'We asked another friend who has a beard [assuming that soldiers at the checkpoint will stop and search the bearded man, believing that he belongs to a 'terrorist' group] to drive the car

in front of us. The soldiers at the checkpoint stopped the car, and therefore when we sneaked the dead body that was sitting in the backseat of the car, the car was not stopped or checked. . . We all worked hard to look for new ways, to give our friend the last respect. . . We protected our rights to be buried in Jerusalem.'

Negotiating death requires community participation, and the dead body's burial in Jerusalem signifies a collective fulfilment of rights and belonging: *'we protected our rights to be buried in Jerusalem.'* The burial represents a performance of remaining present in the homeland, not only of the individual, but also of the entire Palestinian community displaced by colonial occupation. The individual psychological interpretation of death thus becomes a collective psychosocial embodiment of everyday resistance.

This 'system of protection' protects both individual wellbeing and the community's relationship to the homeland, and is one way the community sustains its social order and systems of support. Mundane negotiations of life, during and following death, are central to survival and healing. Because the entire community experiences oppression, some members become experts in subverting the system, while others provide assistance, but do not participate in political resistance. Instead, they try their best to help people cope with their daily life struggles, including managing life after death. The community, within the Jerusalemite context of death and loss, becomes more important than individuals. The community's role is to help make meaning out of the modes of coping and dealing with death, by such methods as developing a sense of coherence or a collective need to mobilise when required, all in an effort to make violence against the dead comprehensible.

The social networks surrounding death and dying create new bridges of solidarity, reconstruct the everydayness of suffering and establish innovative spaces of sharing, caring, and hoping. New modes of caring were

also apparent when families and communities collectively discussed their own history of oppression, while reconstructing their family's history of challenging the state's regime of fragmenting them. Despite the clear lack of resources, the interviewed families managed to find resources to 'live death.' By speaking back, writing back, protecting and respecting rituals of death and honouring loved ones by fulfilling their last wishes, families and communities exercised agency and power against the colonial occupation shaping their lives and offered some prospect for transforming the social context that continues to oppress them.

Discussing living death and recovering life

This examination of death and dying allows the mapping of the Israeli state's power to exercise violence well beyond life, into death, over the dead body and over the very possibility of mourning and burial. This study illuminates the ways in which colonial power is predicated not only on the control and expropriation of the living, but also of the dead and the sites of Palestinian burial. Colonial domination over the dead and graveyards in the context of East Jerusalem is significant. Situating this analysis within the 'death-worlds' that Mbembe (2003) describes as spaces that allow the murderous functions of the settler colonial state to be inscribed over the already dead Palestinian bodies, enables me to obtain an insight into 'living death.' Learning from, and acknowledging the manner, in which Palestinians in oEJ live death while condemning state sponsored necropolitics, we begin to see their creation of alternate possibilities; of thinking of life and the future in times of absence, absenting, and death. Such a proposed analysis subverts simplistic representations of mourning and bereavement, and valorises the power of life and continuity in death to challenge the violence of historical and present dispossession.

Avery Gordon states that the dead 'are not. . . simply dead and safely ensconced, but are ghostly, animated with a certain kind of life whose future must also be secured. . . making contact with the disappeared means encountering the spectre of what the state has tried to repress, means encountering it in the affective mode in which haunting traffics' (Gordon, 1997). Here we can begin to trace the logic of colonial control that the Israeli state attempts to exercise in every sphere of life, including over the Palestinian dead and their cemeteries, while also recognising the forces of the dead who refuse to be silenced, who continue to haunt and condemn the state's violent operations. Returning to the concept of the present/absent, David Lloyd (2012) remarks that Palestinians are always in the paradox of the 'present absentee', seen as people without an identity, in particular the dead are considered as disappeared people with no role or function in the daily life of bereaved. *In this way, Palestinians 'inhabit a 'shadowland' of a lacking or partial citizenship.* Living and dead Palestinians interact in, and with, this shadow land of what and who has disappeared. Gordon (1997) argues that 'to write a history of the present requires a particular kind of perception where the transparent and the shadowy confront each other'. This shadowland of presence/absence is home to Gordon's 'ghostly matters' and their accompanying haunting affects. Gordon explains, 'haunting is one of the most important places where meaning—comprehension—and force intersect'. Haunting signifies what Raymond Williams (1978) has termed 'structures of feelings': as 'actively lived and felt meaningful social experience as it intricately interacts with and defies our conceptions of formal, official and fixed social forms. . . social experiences that are often not recognized as social but taken to be private, idiosyncratic, and even isolating' (Gordon, 1997).

Dead Palestinians, the inhabitants of this 'shadowland,' the physically 'disappeared,' and the 'absent,' all articulate their power through a kind of haunting. This haunting can be seen

in newspaper obituaries where refugees, even when dead, reclaim ownership of the villages from which they were expelled. Nuhad's commitment to her dead husband's comfort also awakens a kind of haunting. She allows him to live beyond his death by keeping his coffin in an air-conditioned room. The mourning expected at a funeral is rewritten as a celebration of resistance, which is transformed into a 'wedding', an event that represents continuity, rather than endings. In its settler colonial ambitions of destruction and replacement, Israeli policies assume death to signify an ending. For Palestinians, rather, it signifies life and in doing so, dead Palestinians 'haunt' Israeli society. Within experiences of death, Palestinians and their families constitute sites that reproduce presence, love, belonging and resistance. The practices of honouring the dead, and of fighting for proper burial spaces and rituals, intervenes and 'haunts' the official state policy of eliminating Palestinian place and history.

Joseph Pugliese comments that the past cannot be dead because it is built into the beings and bodies of the living. Pugliese's analyses suggest that in the face of historic erasure, something survives; '*traces transmitted intercorporeally from generation to generation*' (Pugliese, 2007). When families in East Jerusalem include the place of birth in loved ones' obituaries, we see the intercorporeal transmission from generation to generation, the traces of destroyed villages in historic Palestine are found in the pages of daily newspapers and the continuity of memory is carried by children and grandchildren, reified and remembered by the community; not only is the past not dead, but the dead are not absent from this past, they are '*the endings that are not over*' (Gordon, 1997).

As the stories in this article have shown, the dead can speak and be heard, writing the histories and signifying the future of their homeland. The dead represent the ways a structure of feeling carries with it a call to

action, the belief that there is '*something to be done*' (Gordon, 1997), and offers the potential for socially transforming the context that continues to create suffering. The notion that there is '*something to be done*' brings us back to Martín-Baró's liberation psychology and the psychosocial resistance of oppressed peoples. He reflects:

'All human knowledge is subject to limitations imposed by reality itself. In many respects that reality is opaque, and only by acting upon it, by transforming it, can a human being get information about it. What we see and how we see is of course determined by our perspective, by the place from which we begin our examination of history; but it is determined also by reality itself.' (1996)

Psychosocial analysis, like Williams' '*structures of feelings*' (1978) and Pugliese's intercorporeal transmissions, not only locate individual traumas and loss within their social and political contexts, but as the present study shows also allows individuals and communities to reconcile the stories of their dead loved ones with the living present and their living presence. In this reconciliation, the ghostly play a role in unsettling the legitimacy of the Israeli colonial state and its violent interventions in the everyday. Here, spaces of resistance are revealed, made known, and become present. According to Martín-Baró (1996), who refers to Freire (2000), the psychological, critical, consciousness goes together with the social and political dimension and connects '*personal liberation and social transformation*'.

Yet the stories of death and dying in this article signify power in moments of pain. The psychological trauma, reinterpreted, speaks to an enduring, rather than mortally wounded, spirit. These spirits inhabit multiple locations, seen and unseen, tangible and intangible, and thereby bring us back to the everyday meanings, the '*something's to be done*' shaped and reshaped by Palestinian communities.

Conclusion

'I lost Nisreen, and it was an agonising death, but the community's love when telling our story, my husband's family's love when discovering what happened, my in-laws' respect for the way the three of us hung onto each other during death, is what gave us hope to have our newborn baby that was born two months ago and he is healthy, beautiful, and loves eating.'

Understanding death and dying in oEJ offers valuable conceptual, epistemological, and methodological tools when thinking about death, loss, and resistance. In the context of oEJ, the actions of enlivening the dead and rebuilding life during death are able to offer a form of psychosocial support, address the constant losses of military occupation, promote the Palestinian identity and reconstruct a sense of belonging. These actions enable us to examine the trauma of death in oEJ (and other similar conflict zones), while applying new meanings for healing, recovering and hope for social and political transformation. Such counter modes of resistance open up and challenge spatio-temporal forces and locations, and de-territorialise them to tear down and destructure the settler colonial order.

Studying death and dying in Jerusalem takes the dialectic relationship between the individual and his or her social, political and historical world into account. Mediating between history, politics, social experiences and collective psychology, we find the *'somethings to be done'* that the Palestinian community is engaging with everyday. Such an approach allows us to advance working with the community, while providing a context informed analysis that promotes challenging the status of *'present/absent'* as a legal status, when and while redefining it as the presence/absence of the dead. As well as actively participating in building and strengthening psychosocial support, and offering the potential for social empowerment.

The extraordinary passage from death to life, from past injustice to searching for a brighter future, suggests that, even in death, colonised communities subvert systems of oppression. The shared voices and ordeals solicit researchers to morally problematising human suffering under settler colonial regimes by refusing to accept the *'present/absent'* Palestinian deaths and losses that have been made invisible. Proposing moral problematisation of reading and living death, and acknowledging Palestinian acts of resistance in death, might hinder the development of conditions producing further dispossession(s).

To morally problematise living death in oEJ, one needs to acknowledge the endless suffering and current limits on obtaining peace at the political level. Creating, opening up and holding spaces for new modes of resistance, challenging colonial production of knowledge, destabilising dispossession instils pride, strengthens belonging and engages the community. This power of continuity, of being and staying present and rooted, is created and nourished in social spaces of death and dying. And so we end with Paulo Freire's reminder: *'Just as the oppressor, in order to oppress, needs a theory of oppressive action, so the oppressed, in order to become free, also need a theory of action'* (Freire, 2000).

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