

Sacred Space/ Contested Place: Intergenerational Memory and the Shifting Meanings of the Shrine/Tomb of Joseph

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Abstract

David Marshall examines the case of *Maqam Yusuf* (the Shrine of Joseph, commonly referred to as Joseph's Tomb in English), a contested religious site near the northern West Bank city of Nablus. Often called a "microcosm" of the Israeli/Palestinian conflict, the shrine has long been viewed as a site of religious intolerance, marked by regular violent confrontations between Palestinian youths and Israeli soldiers. Such a view obscures deeply rooted traditions of multireligious shrine visitation and veneration practiced by Christians, Jews, Muslims, and Samaritans at Maqam Yusuf and other sites throughout Palestine, traditions that themselves predate the arrival of Abrahamic monotheism. This article presents an alternative perspective, namely, that conflict over the shrine is not one of inherent religious rivalry but is rather a conflict of settler-colonial acquisition and resistance. Going further, this paper considers the violence of erasure, and the politics of forgetting as a form of resistance. Drawing on multigenerational oral histories, Marshall charts the shifting meanings of Maqam Yusuf against the changing geopolitical dynamics of the Israeli occupation, highlighting the silences and gaps in generational memory that surround the site. In particular, the article demonstrates how Maqam Yusuf transformed from a site where women practiced and fashioned their social and religious selves, to a site where young men perform a resistant masculinity.

Keywords

Memory; shrines; settler colonialism; religion; oral history; Nablus.

Joseph was Jacob's son. I remember, he used to tend to his sheep. He would water his sheep at Jacob's well, then graze them here in this valley. His brothers left him in a well, maybe this well, God knows. Caravan traders on their way from Syria took him to Egypt, where he was imprisoned for seven years. He was freed and became a minister for the king. He died in Egypt and was buried there. God knows. This maqam is a shrine for Yusuf, but not a tomb. The tomb is for another holy man, named Yusuf Dwaykat, who was a holy man who is buried there. They did archaeological digs here in 1909 that did not reveal any historical connection to Nabi Yusuf.

In the past, Muslims, Christians, Jews, and Samaritans all used to visit the tomb. There was no difference between us. We lived together. No difference. We all say, "There is no God but God." Jews are Muslims. They are Muslims because they submit to one God.... All the heavenly religions lived together on this land here. It was European colonialism that divided us like they divided the Ottoman Empire. The Zionists are European colonizers. They came here to make a state for them alone.¹

These are the words of a ninety-year-old man whom my research assistant Nadia and I met by *Maqam Yusuf* (Joseph's Shrine) in Balata al-Balad, a Palestinian village wedged between the contiguous conurbation of Balata refugee camp and the city of Nablus. Though notorious today as a site of perceived religious intolerance and violent confrontation between Palestinian youth and Israeli soldiers, most observers are largely unaware of the role this site once played in everyday Palestinian life. Even this man's words, weaving together centuries of religious and historical narrative as his own first-person recollection, speak to the tomb's political rather than personal significance.

Moving beyond debates about the site's religious authenticity, spectacular accounts of violence, or idealized narratives of coexistence, this article brings the memories and voices of ordinary Palestinians into the story of Maqam Yusuf, while also examining the silences that surround this site today. In doing so, it explores a generational gap between remembering and forgetting, and the divergent meanings that different generations of Palestinians have attached to this site over time. Drawing on multigenerational oral histories of Maqam Yusuf from Palestinians who live close to it, this article examines the memories of this site, charting its shifting meaning in relation to changing dynamics of the Israeli occupation. In particular, it demonstrates how the shrine has transformed from a site where women once practiced and fashioned their social and religious selves, to a site where young men perform a youthful, resistant masculinity.

Called Maqam Yusuf in Arabic and *Qevar Yosef* (Joseph's Tomb) in Hebrew, the site has long been revered by Jews, Samaritans, Christians, and Muslims due to its association with Joseph, biblical patriarch and Qur'anic prophet.² Adherents of these faiths have historically differed between and among themselves as to whether the tomb is the burial place of Joseph, or a shrine commemorating his boyhood dwelling place near the ancient Canaanite city of Shechem (Nablus). Some accounts give the Tomb

of the Patriarchs in Hebron as Joseph's final resting place, while other sources claim his burial site is near Jerusalem, or in Safad in the Galilee. There is no archaeological evidence to verify any of these claims. Archaeologists regard Maqam Yusuf as a relic site, rather than a historic site *per se*.³ Indeed, it is possible that the tomb is the site of an ancient shrine to a Canaanite deity later reinscribed with biblical significance.⁴ Today, many Palestinians claim that the tomb belongs not to Nabi Yusuf (Prophet Joseph), but to Shaykh Yusuf Dwaykat, a local *wali* or holy person.⁵ These are not mutually exclusive claims, given the practice of sharing and reusing sacred sites from one era to the next.

My purpose is not to adjudicate these claims, but rather to examine how the shrine has emerged as a contested site within the context of the so-called Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Since the Israeli invasion of the West Bank in 1967 and subsequent expansion of Israeli settlements throughout the occupied territory, Maqam Yusuf has become a flashpoint between Palestinian youths and the Israeli army who frequently escort settlers and other Jewish worshippers to the tomb. The shrine has witnessed repeated clashes, killings, and destruction. As such, it has become a cliché for observers to refer to it as a “microcosm” of the conflict.⁶ Maqam Yusuf, the story goes, is the conflict in miniature: a small piece of indivisible sacred property claimed by two rival religious groups within a zero-sum contest over territory.

Rather than evidence of long-simmering animosity between two primordial tribes, however, we can instead view clashes at Maqam Yusuf as the effect of a settler-colonial conquest that has produced a conflict between an occupier seeking to normalize its connection to the land, and an occupied people seeking to resist that normalization. Indeed, the recent history of conflict is only part of the story. Many Palestinians regard Maqam Yusuf as symbolic of Palestinian religious pluralism. Older Palestinian residents, particularly women, fondly recall the central role Maqam Yusuf once had in their social and religious lives as a site of ceremony, worship, and leisure. We can read the painful erasure of such memories as part of the trauma inflicted on this site. Like attempts at physical erasure, forgetting serves as a sacrificial act of survival intended to deny the occupier a territorial foothold. In addressing forgetting as a tactic of self-preservation, this research contributes to the literature on the politics of memory as well as that on shared shrines. Moreover, by examining narratives that gesture toward the resacralization of shrines like Maqam Yusuf, and calls to revive long-standing traditions of multireligious veneration of such sites, this article presents alternatives to settler-colonial temporalities of inevitable erasure.

Before turning to Palestinians' memories of Maqam Yusuf, this article contextualizes the site within biblical and historical narratives. Rather than present a linear unfolding of history as an inevitable clash between two mutually exclusive narratives, I offer a palimpsestic reading of place as produced by multiple overlapping narratives, some coming to the fore and others being erased at various points.⁷ These narratives include stories of conflict and coexistence disappearing and reappearing together at various points to reveal complex configurations and juxtapositions. From these historical narratives, I turn to debates about whether shared shrines like Maqam Yusuf serve as examples of multireligious coexistence or what Robert Hayden refers to as “antagonistic tolerance.”⁸ Like Hayden, I argue for widening our historical frame

beyond contemporary clashes and considering the changing contexts in which sharing or conflict occurs. Moreover, I argue that, in Palestine, settler colonialism offers a useful lens through which to analyze Maqam Yusuf as a site of contested memory. As Zionist activists seek to assert their claims over the site, erasing its significance to local Palestinian communities, both memory and forgetting can be understood together within a framework of indigenous Palestinian counter-memory. First, however, I turn to a description of the research methods employed in this study.

Methods and Limitations

Drawing on recent work on intergenerationality from children's geographies, this study puts younger and older generations into dialogue to better understand different perceptions of place within constantly shifting social and political contexts.⁹ Specifically, I use place-based narrative oral history interviews with different generations of residents who live near Maqam Yusuf, or who used to visit it, to understand how meanings and practices associated with the site have changed.¹⁰ In summer 2018, I began conducting ethnographic visits to Balata al-Balad. During this time, I made several visits to the shrine itself, speaking with Palestinian security, residents, and elders. In addition, I began interviewing shopkeepers and residents in the Old City of Nablus, based on the suggestions of the older residents of Balata al-Balad who recall families from the Old City visiting Maqam Yusuf regularly.

In summer 2019, I returned to Nablus to conduct interviews with different generations of residents living near Maqam Yusuf, as well as older residents of Nablus who recall visiting the tomb prior to the restrictions imposed upon the space. This older generation, whom we can call *jil al-Nakba*, is the generation born either just before or just after the Nakba of 1948, and thus remember Maqam Yusuf after the establishment of the state of Israel, under Jordanian rule, and after the 1967 invasion and occupation. I also conducted interviews with members of a middle adult generation, whom we can refer to as *jil al-Naksa*. They largely came of age after the Naksa of 1967, spent their formative years growing up under Israeli occupation, and remember the first intifada of 1987.¹¹ Finally, I interviewed Palestinian young people aged thirty years and younger who grew up during the post-Oslo era, came of age under the Palestinian Authority, and remember the second intifada, or its immediate aftermath. I returned in summer of 2022 to conduct further interviews. I conducted most of the interviews in Arabic, sometimes with the help of two Palestinian research assistants (one male, one female), though some were conducted in English.

In all, I conducted interviews with forty-four people (thirty-one men and thirteen women). By national identity, religion, and gender, interviewees were: thirty-four Palestinian Muslims – twenty-two men, twelve women; five Palestinian Samaritan community representatives – four men and one woman; three Palestinian Christian community (Nablus) leaders (two clerics, one layperson) from Nablus – all men; and two Israeli Jewish representatives, both men (one American-Israeli settler, one Israeli) from an Israeli Jewish religious organization that sponsors repairs to the tomb and facilitates monthly visits.

By age and gender categories, twelve interviews were with Palestinians over sixty-five years of age (six women and six men). Another twelve interviews were with the middle generation, thirty to sixty-five years of age (eight men and four women). Ten interviews were conducted with younger Palestinians, under thirty years of age (eight men and two women). The gender disproportion in the latter groups is a drawback of the intergenerational interviewing technique I used.¹² I conducted most interviews in family homes, with multiple generations present, including the elder patriarch or matriarch of the family. Most often, their adult son would assist with the interview, helping to clarify questions and add details to the responses. When we arrived chronologically to a time period that the adult son remembered (usually the 1970s), he would share his own recollections. Eventually, opportunities arose to engage younger members of the family (usually sons in their late teens or twenties), who had been sitting in deferential silence, helping with refreshments. These youth would sometimes share stories of clashes at Maqam Yusuf and would often remark that they had never before heard their grandparents' stories about traditions at the shrine.

These intergenerational interviews helped address gaps of memory and fill the silences of forgotten stories. However, patriarchal family dynamics and conservative gender relations also placed limitations on this interview technique. Adult women were often busy preparing tea, coffee, or food, and would only offer fleeting input as they came in and out of the interview setting. The three substantive interviews I conducted with adult women took place in public spaces with their children present. Younger men in the family would offer insights, but due to parental oversight, were unlikely to speak freely. For this reason, I also conducted additional one-on-one interviews with youth in coffee shops. Female youth were rarely present during family interviews. The two female youths I interviewed (recent university graduates) were previous acquaintances from Balata al-Balad who had offered to assist with research and find potential interview subjects. Though they were able to recommend older family members and neighbors to interview, attempts to recruit their female peers were revealingly unsuccessful. As one interviewee explained: "The girls I talked to said they have nothing to do with that place, and that I should talk to the *shabab* [young men]." As detailed below, this perspective illustrates a generational shift in the meaning of Maqam Yusuf, from a site of particular religious and social importance to women and children, to a site of political struggle for male youths. The next section contextualizes these shifting meanings within deeper religious and historical narratives.

Between Biblical and Historical Time

In the story of Joseph and his brothers, there were clear signs to those who seek answers.

Qur'an, 12:17¹³

The Qur'an extolls the hermeneutical prowess of Joseph and invites listeners to ponder the meaning of his story, which it calls "the best of stories." Surat Yusuf, or the chapter of Joseph, tells the story of Joseph – from his brothers throwing him in the well, to his

imprisonment in Egypt, to his rise as a vizier in the Egyptian court, and to his eventual reunification with his family – as a single, continuous narrative. This contrasts with the circuitous storytelling style for which the Qur’an is renowned. Tradition holds that the Prophet Muhammad received all 111 *ayat* (verses) of this surah in a single sitting in Mecca before the Muslim *hijra* or migration to Medina.

Not included in the Qur’anic narrative, however, is Joseph’s death and burial. For that, the Hebrew Bible apprises us, prior to Joseph’s impending death, his brothers pledged to return his remains to the land of his fathers in Canaan. According to biblical scholar Shalom Goldman, the story of the return and interment of Joseph’s remains as narrated in Exodus and the Book of Joshua occupies a “pivotal point in Biblical narrative,” rhetorically linking “the period of the patriarchs, with its roots in Mesopotamia, the Hebrew bondage in the land of Egypt, and the conquest and settlement of Canaan.”¹⁴ Samaritan accounts dating back to the fourth century CE locate Maqam Yusuf at the foot of Tell Balata, a mound in the valley between mounts Ebal and Gerizim, near the entrance of Shechem. According to biblical accounts, Shechem fell within a territorial allotment given to the Israelite tribe of Ephraim, from whom Samaritans claim lineage. For centuries, Samaritans have revered Maqam Yusuf as one of their holiest sites, second only to Mount Gerizim. Some Jewish sources uphold the biblical narrative of Joseph’s burial near Shechem, while others uphold rabbinical tradition that the Tomb of the Patriarchs in Hebron holds Joseph’s remains or place his tomb in Safad.¹⁵ The competing sites indicate regional as much as religious rivalry, as localities vied for the honor of hosting the patriarch’s remains, and their attendant pilgrim traffic.

The early Byzantine period introduced a dispute between Samaritan and Christian authorities over access to Maqam Yusuf and potential removal of his remains. Records from that era indicate that some relics from the tomb were removed and taken to Constantinople in 415 CE (today, visitors to Topkapı Palace in Istanbul can view a robe said to be Joseph’s). The mosaic map of Madaba from the sixth century shows a site associated with Joseph near Nablus, though it lacks the usual modifier “holy” indicating a saintly relic.¹⁶ According to Crusader-era accounts, the tomb had fallen out of use by Christians, becoming a Muslim pilgrimage site maintained by Samaritans.¹⁷

Following Salah al-Din’s victory over the Crusaders, shrines flourished in Palestine. In addition to building shrines to the *sahaba* (companions of the Prophet Muhammad), as well as other Muslim *salihin* (righteous people) and *shuhada’* (martyrs), the Ayyubid and later Mamluk dynasties maintained shrines dedicated to Old Testament figures and even rabbinic sages as *awqaf* (Islamic endowments).¹⁸ In doing so, Muslim authorities took on the role of custodians of the Abrahamic tradition, bolstering their political and religious influence. They also continued a long-standing local custom of shrine-construction harkening back to Canaanite-period pagan traditions. This shared reverence among monotheistic faiths for saints, sages, and shrines, itself an echo of pagan practices, is not an indication of irreconcilable religious differences, but of religious affinity.

Muslim travelers and geographers writing in the twelfth through fourteenth

centuries CE note the existence of a shrine to Joseph near Nablus, though some also record the Tomb of the Patriarchs in Hebron as a potential burial site.¹⁹ The present structure, a domed Islamic *maqam*, dates to a reconstruction of the shrine in 1868, during the centralization of Ottoman rule in Palestine.²⁰



Figure 1. Interior of Maqam Yusuf as it appears today, showing the internal structure of the Islamic maqam constructed in 1868, and the more recently renovated cenotaph and floor. Photo by author, 27 June 2019.

European Christian travelers also describe a shrine dedicated to Joseph near Nablus. Oxford scholar and Church of England clergyman Henry Maundrell described a small mosque built over the sepulchre of Joseph just outside the city of Nablus in 1697.²¹ In the 1800s, European travelers to the Holy Land seeking to map biblical geography onto the physical and cultural landscape of Ottoman Palestine relied on Arab guides, Arabic place names, and local legends, often taking them as historical fact.²² In his 1838 account, Irish author William Cooke Taylor, who helped popularize Maqam Yusuf within the modern European Christian imaginary as the resting place of the Patriarch Joseph, encountered a shared shrine revered by the multiple religious communities that inhabited the area.²³ Mark Twain reproduced much the same scene in *Innocents Abroad* (1868):

Few tombs on earth command the veneration of so many races [sic] and men [sic] of diverse creeds as this of Joseph. Samaritan and Jew, Moslem

and Christian alike, revere it, and honor it with their visits. The tomb of Joseph, the dutiful son, the affectionate, forgiving brother, the virtuous man, the wise Prince and ruler. Egypt felt his influence – the world knows his history.²⁴

Multireligious veneration was not, however, unique to this tomb, or even tombs associated with biblical prophets. A 1903 expedition through Syria and Palestine by Lewis Paton, Samuel Curtiss, and Stuart Crawford documented numerous “high places” and “holy trees,” half of which were shared by Muslim, Christian, and Druze Palestinians.²⁵

Following the establishment of the British Mandate in 1922, archaeological expeditions increased, and European archaeologists interpreted their findings through a biblical lens, affirming Christian and Jewish Zionist claims to the land.²⁶ As the Zionist movement galvanized Palestinian nationalist opposition, prominent holy places such as the Western Wall (Buraq’s Wall) and the Cave of Patriarchs (Ibrahimi Mosque), to which Jewish access had been restricted, took on political significance. According to an elder of Balata al-Balad who grew up during the Mandate period, these tensions were felt at Maqam Yusuf as well:

When I was a child, we were under the British. They would bring in the Jewish religious people. We would throw pebbles at them, small stones! By God, we didn’t know who they were, but we knew they wanted to come and take our village. We knew! [laughs] They would yell at us and curse our religion and curse Muhammad, peace be upon him [laughs].²⁷

Nevertheless, he recalls tourists, Christian and Jewish alike, in later periods, coming on buses to visit the site “in peace.”

After 1948, Israeli archaeology continued the legacy of European biblical archaeology.²⁸ The newly established state built and named new settlements in a way that accentuated a sense of historical continuity and national unity,²⁹ and the Israeli Ministry of Religions supported the processes of mapping and “expropriating” Muslim holy places and turning them into “exclusively Jewish holy places.”³⁰ This was replicated after 1967 by Israel’s military and civil authorities operating in the West Bank, where Israeli settlers also established settlements on the sites of archaeological digs. Palestinians with whom I spoke remember busloads of visitors coming to visit Maqam Yusuf. One older woman who grew up in Balata al-Balad recalled collecting antique coins and other artefacts to sell to international tourists prior to 1967, and also recalls receiving Israeli visitors after 1967.³¹

Jewish settlers began visiting Maqam Yusuf in the mid-1970s, while the extremist religious settler movement Gush Emunim (Bloc of the Faithful) was attempting to establish an outpost settlement near Nablus at Sebastiya.³² During this time, the Israeli military established a checkpoint forbidding Palestinian access. In 1982, settlers from Yitzar and surrounding settlements established a yeshiva named *Od Yosef Chai* (Joseph Still Lives) at the shrine under the protection of the Israeli army. Some of the

residents whom I interviewed remember the yeshiva students walking down the main street to their lessons in the shrine, even stopping at the local shops on the way home to buy sweets. Some also recall tensions arising with students from a Palestinian boys' school next to the shrine: Palestinian students clashed with Israeli soldiers at a military checkpoint established to secure the yeshiva. After the first Palestinian intifada of 1987, Maqam Yusuf became the site of frequent and intense clashes between the Israeli military and Palestinians, especially from nearby Balata refugee camp, which had become a locus of activism.

In 1995, an interim agreement signed as part of the Oslo accords specified that responsibility over "sites of religious significance" or "Holy Sites" in Areas A and B would be transferred to the Palestinian Authority, stating that, "Both sides shall respect and protect the ... religious rights of Jews, Christians, Moslems and Samaritans," including free access and freedom of worship.³³ The agreement excludes Rachel's Tomb in Bethlehem and Maqam Yusuf in Nablus (listed Jewish holy sites), which would remain under direct Israeli control, despite being located in Palestinian built-up areas. Jewish settler visits and renovations to solidify the shrine's Jewish character increased during this time, and the military checkpoint, which remained at the site, continued to be a frequent flashpoint. In 1996, Palestinian protestors and militants overran the tomb during a day of demonstrations triggered by the opening of an Israeli archaeological tunnel running adjacent to the Haram al-Sharif, killing six Israeli soldiers.³⁴ The heavy cost of securing a site in Area A, particularly one of questionable religious authenticity, prompted the Israeli army, the Israeli border police, and the Shin Bet intelligence services to request that the Israeli government relinquish control to the Palestinian Authority.

Maqam Yusuf was once again engulfed in violence after Ariel Sharon's provocative visit to the Haram al-Sharif in September 2000 ignited the second intifada. In October, a Druze officer in the Israeli army was killed during a standoff with Palestinian fighters.³⁵ Outcry over his death and the continued cost of defending the tomb eventually led to the withdrawal of Israeli forces from the area. Palestinian protestors damaged the tomb following the evacuation and a rabbi was killed attempting to enter the area at night. Though the Palestinian Authority secured the area and began repairs the next day, workers repairing the tomb sparked controversy when they restored the dome to its former color – green, which Israelis took as an assertion of Muslim dominance over the site. Under U.S. and international pressure, Palestinian workers were forced to paint the dome white again.

The Israeli withdrawal from the area was short-lived, as Israeli forces invaded and reoccupied Nablus in April 2002. The invasion placed the city and surrounding refugee camps and villages, including Balata al-Balad, under curfew for weeks at a time, and inflicted heavy loss of life and widespread damage. Taking advantage of these conditions, settlers began surreptitiously visiting the site. As a young Israeli settler from Itamar settlement who used to visit the site at this time told me in an interview: "If you are prevented from going to a place that is yours, a place you believe belongs to you, you will try to go there twenty-four hours a day."³⁶ Israeli military forces

began facilitating monthly visits, providing armed escort to several hundred Jewish worshippers in the middle of the night. In 2005, the military suspended these visits due to security concerns.

In 2007 and 2008, members of the Breslov Hasidim sect, who incorporate singing and dancing as part of worship, requested access to the site, concerned about the gap in visitation and potential damage. In 2009, monthly visits were resumed under Israeli military protection. In August 2010, the Israeli military and the Palestinian Authority reached an agreement on renovating the site and allowing regular visitation, and PA security services routinely coordinated with Israeli forces to facilitate regular visitation to the shrine.

In 2015, Palestinian demonstrators who were protesting Israel's demolition of a house in the village attempted to attack the shrine, but Palestinian security forces repelled them. Busloads of mainly Breslov Hasidim settlers, at times numbering over a thousand, engage in raucous singing and dancing at the shrine during monthly midnight visits, lasting until the early hours of the morning. During these visits, Balata al-Balad is placed under twelve-hour curfew, from around nine o'clock in the evening until nine o'clock the next morning. Israeli soldiers set up checkpoints around the area and take up positions atop Palestinian residential buildings, often sequestering the families living within them. Palestinian protestors meet the Israeli army entourage with resistance. Shootings and arrests at the checkpoints are common. Israeli soldiers have shot and killed over a dozen Palestinian youths, as well as bystanders, in confrontations at the site since 2015. The indiscriminate use of tear gas during incursions takes a heavy toll on families living in the area. The seemingly unending violence has all but erased any other memories of this place.

Shared/Contested Sacred Sites

Current scholarship on shared/contested shrines pivots between two polarized perspectives, one emphasizing the inevitability of conflict that results from two or more religious communities claiming the same site, and the other emphasizing how shared sites increase contact and cooperation.³⁷ Ron Hassner's view that "sacred places cannot be shared" typifies the first perspective, which regards religion as the main driver of difference and separation as the only way to resolve religious conflict.³⁸ This has largely been the approach taken in Israel/Palestine, both on the political level and in everyday life.³⁹ Against this view, peaceful interactions between different religious groups is a regular occurrence at sites throughout the Eastern Mediterranean, including Israel/Palestine, and South Asia.⁴⁰

What conditions help (or hinder) such coexistence? Hayden argues in favor of ethnographic methods that take into consideration a broader context, emphasizing that sacred sites are "inherently linked to social processes that are larger than the purely local."⁴¹ He also notes that the mere presence of multiple religious communities is not necessarily proof of amicability: coexistence might merely be constrained hostility or, at best, "passive non-interference."⁴² Hayden's model of "antagonistic tolerance"

provides a framework for understanding “both long periods of relatively peaceful interaction and shorter periods of violent conflict” between religious communities in a particular area. These moments of “intertemporal violence” that punctuate long periods of peace, Hayden argues, occur during times of political transition or contested dominance.⁴³ In other words, violence flares up in the absence of a clear and uncontested authority. That violence has intensified around Maqam Yusuf since the Oslo accords introduced ambiguity about authority over the shrine seems to support this view.

Such an analysis is helpful in its attentiveness to how the politics of sacred space plays out within broader power dynamics. Meanwhile, an intersectional approach to multireligious shrine sharing is necessary to attend to the various vectors of commonality and difference within and between religious groups including along lines of language and race/ethnicity.⁴⁴ For example, although Zionist discourses have tended to homogenize a singular Jewish community, the Sephardic, Mizrahi, and Arab Jews, including indigenous Palestinian Jewish communities and immigrants from Yemen and North Africa, have historically differed in their attitudes toward intermingling across religious and gender lines at shared holy sites.⁴⁵ While the antagonistic tolerance model seeks to understand how religious groups in a particular area negotiate sacred space amid a changing field of power relations, it does not explain the power dynamics of dichotomization and homogenization that, in the case of Israel/Palestine, constructed “Arab” and “Jew” as distinct and incongruous ethnoreligious groups in the first place.

The settler-colonial framework is useful in moving beyond reductive views that take the situation in Israel/Palestine as an exceptional zero-sum religious conflict. Although the dominant view is that the conflict in Israel/Palestine is an ethnonational and religious struggle, a settler-colonial lens allows us to see how conflict, partition, displacement, and occupation have, in part, shaped Palestinians into a distinct polity in opposition to Zionism.⁴⁶ This formulation follows Fanon’s observation that settler colonialism produces the native “as such” through interpolation.⁴⁷ Zionism, like other settler-colonial projects, seeks to dominate the indigenous population with the ultimate goal of removing and replacing them. Spatially, it seeks to steadily Judaize space – over which it can claim sovereignty and displace Palestinians – and wall off and isolate Palestinians within ever diminishing confines.⁴⁸

When it comes to Jewish-claimed holy sites embedded within Palestinian space, the strategy of spatial segregation manifests in what Bowman, referring to Rachel’s tomb, calls “encystation,” describing its capture and enclosure for exclusive Israeli use and control.⁴⁹ Unlike Bethlehem, near the Green Line, this strategy is much more difficult near Nablus within the hills of the northern West Bank. While regular visits by settlers seek to normalize Maqam Yusuf as a Jewish-Israeli space, Palestinian protests disrupt this process. In this formulation, the conflict over Maqam Yusuf is not a religious conflict (at least not *wholly* holy), but an attempt by settlers to Judaize the site within a larger project of colonization and by Palestinians to deny settlers any claim to the land that the tomb may represent. However, denying Jewish connection to the shrine also threatens denying an indigenous ontological relationship to that site,

in the form of memories and folk traditions deeply interwoven into the socio-spatial fabric of Palestinian (multi)religious and social life. I turn now to those memories.

Collective Religious and Social Memory

The prophet Jacob, peace be upon him, became very sad about his lost son [Joseph]. He would go to a cave, which is now the Green Mosque in the Old City, it was built around this cave.... We kept the memories of the family of Jacob until today. We named the fields below Jacob's Field, and every year we gave a portion of our harvest to the mosque for distribution to the poor and we called it *awqaf Ibrahim al-Khalili*, because Abraham was Jacob's grandfather, the father of Isaac and Ishmael, God grant all of them peace.... Some say that *bani Isra'il* brought Joseph's remains with them when they came to this land. Maybe they buried him in Jerusalem, maybe in Hebron, maybe somewhere around here, or maybe he is still in Egypt. God knows.⁵⁰

This narrative, given by an octogenarian from Balata al-Balad, resembles that which opened this article in the way it recounts religious and historical narrative as first-hand memory. "But if you want the truth," his son, a man in his fifties, interrupted, "it is not Joseph's tomb [*qabr*]. It is just a shrine [*maqam*]. Just so the people can remember him, and send peace to him, and greet him [*tahyatuhu*], because he was from here." When I asked the man's father what he would like to see happen to the site, however, the old man said, "God willing, in the future, I hope it goes back to the way it was before, an important place for all the people, like it was in the past. I wish it would go back to being a tomb." In the historical time of the Israeli/Palestinian conflict over land, a *maqam* is not and cannot be a tomb. As such, the man longs for a resacralization of time and a re-enchantment of the cultural landscape, to return sacred space to being sacred space rather than national territory.

For the older residents of Balata al-Balad, *Maqam Yusuf* was not just a religious space, but also a functional social space. In addition to being a shrine, it was a mosque, a school, and a place where important occasions were held, including weddings, ceremonial haircuts, circumcisions, birth celebrations, and religious holidays. Given the central role that women play in family ceremonies like weddings and births, and given that women are less likely to pray in the male-dominated space of the local mosque, *Maqam Yusuf* was a central site in the social and spiritual lives of Palestinian women. The women elders whom I interviewed would light up when asked to recall their memories of the shrine. Umm Shadi, born in 1956, remembers how women would come to *Maqam Yusuf* in the days before the occupation:

I remember, all of us young kids, every Friday, the men would be at the mosques, and we'd see the women coming, bringing their children, bringing their supper, coming from Nablus, from different neighborhoods, and from villages and the camps, too – from 'Askar, from Balata. They

would come from all around and the neighborhood would be full. They would pray Friday noon prayers there. They would eat breakfast there, drink, have supper there, and at the end of the day they would go home. We were kids and we would go up to see what they were doing. We would go out and see the ladies. Just like that. It was freedom. If you wanted to go in to see the Prophet Yusuf you could go in. There wasn't anyone to forbid us. That was in the days of Jordan, when the Jordanian government was in control of Palestine. The Jordanian army. Before the Naksa [1967 war]. There weren't any problems, it was freedom.⁵¹

In this telling, Maqam Yusuf was an important social space for all women of different class backgrounds, gathering urbanite, villager, and refugee women.

In one intergenerational interview, a man in his fifties and his elderly mother fondly recalled weddings that were held at Maqam Yusuf. I replicate their conversation at length to illustrate the intergenerational exchange of memory:

Walid: The last wedding party was in 1985. 1986 passed, then 1987 the first intifada started, so that tradition stopped. It was like the *hajja* said, the day of the wedding was usually Friday, after Friday prayer, people would go, dressed in their finest, to the groom's house, where he was getting bathed.

Umm Walid: They would eat a big meal there.

Walid: Or at the house of one of his relatives. They would have supper and the bathing of the groom. The family of the groom would feed the group, and they would bring a horse, decorated in finery.

Umm Walid: Gold.

Walid: ... and bring an umbrella.

Umm Walid: With *lirat* [coins] hanging from it.

Walid: And the groom would ride the horse holding the umbrella, because of the sun, because most of the weddings would be in the summer... So, they would go from a place called *harat al-'ayn* [neighborhood of the spring].

Umm Walid: Where the settlers come now.

Walid: That was like "downtown" Balata. They would walk through the neighborhood with the horse, the men would be in two lines in front of the groom, they would be doing the Palestinian salutations, walking in front of the groom and the groom behind them. Then behind the groom would be the ladies, ululating. They would keep walking for about an

hour, around the neighborhood, until they reached the open area of Nabi Yusuf. As I remember it, from when I was small. Now there are two schools, but at the time there were no schools, and the area was open.

Umm Walid: They would grow onions, herbs, and vegetables.

Walid: In the summer, yes, it was a garden ... it was a big open space. So, the people would come when the groom arrived, and sit in the *zawiya* [religious gathering space] and bring in instruments and dance Palestinian *dabka* in the circle there. And there was, I remember at that time, every person had a horse, so they would bring them, and race their horses in the field east of the maqam. So those were the traditions that were present at that time.

Umm Walid: They would come from the village, from Nablus, and from other villages to come and see the races.... All those traditions, where did they go, do you know?⁵²

In this way, the site functioned as a central social gathering space and a site of religious significance. As Umm Walid put it, Fridays at Maqam Yusuf were “like a picnic, but also worship.” She continued:

At birth celebrations we would remember the prophet, praise the prophet, and things like that. Ladies, you know. I mean, life was beautiful – freedom, freedom. Everyone would go, dress up their kids. And we would all drink water. There’s a waterwell with cold, delicious water.... The women would say “blessings and peace to you our Prophet and our Master Yusuf.” Things like that. We were all young and we would watch the women.⁵³

Similarly, as Walid recalled, women would seek to be blessed with a child, saying, “O Lord, if you bestow on me a son, I will cut his hair, here at Nabi Yusuf.”⁵⁴ In interviews with older women and their adult sons, some would suggest that these beliefs and traditions were just the naive superstitions of women. As Umm Shadi put it: “We’d say, ‘Let’s go to Nabi Yusuf’... We would celebrate births and supplicate [*nad’i*], which they say is innovation [*bid’a*] now. What did we know? We didn’t know anything ... only God knows.” Here we can see an almost apologetic disavowal of women’s folk religious traditions, perhaps owing to the influence of Salafi-inspired Islamic revivalism as well as concerns that such traditions might reinforce Israeli claims to Maqam Yusuf as a Jewish space. Indeed, this sudden claim to Jewish space came as a shock to many Palestinians, as Umm Shadi recalled: “It was a great place, for everyone. You could hear the women supplicating ‘O our Lord, o our Master Yusuf ...’ Then they took it. ‘This is *our* prophet.’ Really, this shocked us when they said that.”⁵⁵

Such statements challenged the idea that Maqam Yusuf was a site whose

significance was exclusive to a single community, but my research also complicated somewhat romantic depictions of religious coexistence. Muslim residents could not recall Samaritans or Christians visiting Maqam Yusuf, and suggested they may have gone on different days. Interestingly, Palestinian Christians describe many of the same practices undertaken by Muslims at Maqam Yusuf, such as prayer, picnics, special social occasions, and religious ceremonies. However, they recall them taking place not at Maqam Yusuf, but at nearby Jacob's well, which was then a field of ruins where the Greek Orthodox church, built in 1893, had been destroyed in the earthquake of 1927. Likewise, Samaritans describe practices at Maqam Yusuf similar to those described by Palestinian Muslims, namely prayer and supplication. Though Samaritan visits to the site continue today, they are severely restricted by the occupation. Samaritans also visit the nearby holy site of Maqam Nabi 'Uzayr in the village of 'Awarta, which is also revered by Muslims and is a site of incursion by Israeli settlers. Samaritans describe visits to this site that include prayer, picnics, and leisure, much the way residents of Nablus and Balata al-Balad remember Maqam Yusuf. We can view these shared sites not as representing some idealized coexistence or even antagonistic tolerance but as spaces for a form of "parallel pray," where Muslims, Christians, and Samaritans engage in similar customs, albeit in different times and places.⁵⁶

Conflict, Erasure, and Amnesia

As most interview subjects indicated, Israel's invasion and occupation of the West Bank in 1967 brought social gatherings at Maqam Yusuf to an end. Women from Nablus stopped coming to celebrate their occasions. The people of Balata al-Balad continued to hold wedding parties at the tomb until well into the 1980s, until this was interrupted by the intifada. One man from the village recalled:

We started to have problems. Youth started attacking the checkpoint at the shrine. There were clashes, and wounded, and martyrs... we felt like they took our house, like they came in and took our house when they took Maqam Yusuf and forbid us from it. We knew this was to establish a foothold in our land. They wanted to make their ideas about this tomb a reality and they wanted to make it difficult for us to live a normal life in our own homes while they make the situation normal for themselves.⁵⁷

This time of conflict came with a change in perception of the tomb, as this man noted:

Nowadays, we know this is not the prophet Yusuf's tomb. It is Yusuf Dwaykat, a *wali* from Balata al-Balad. That's who is buried in the tomb. Even if it is [the prophet] Yusuf's tomb, it doesn't give the settlers the right to take it. They can't just use any artefact and use it as an excuse to take our land. It's like *maskhara Juha* [Juha's joke], you know?⁵⁸ The youth today know it's not really Nabi Yusuf, so that's why they are angry about that place. 'We should just destroy it,' they say, 'finish with it!' In

my opinion, we want the Jews to visit it, of course, no problem, but visit it in peace, normally, not like an army of occupation.⁵⁹

This view is representative of many who feel that the tomb is being used as an excuse for Israelis to extend their territorial reach and displace Palestinians.

For many Palestinian youth today, Maqam Yusuf is a blank space surrounded by a wall to be avoided at all costs. For some, it is a place to go out and confront the occupation face-to-face. One young man in his early twenties said that he passed by the shrine for ten years on his way to school, not knowing anything about it. He, like most of the young people I spoke with, had never heard of the traditions associated with it:

When I used to walk home from school, I would pass by the shrine. It was open. There was no gate like there is now. So, a lot of students or classmates would go in there and hang out, but I was afraid to go into the place, because I didn't know what it was.... I heard terrible stories. Like, scary stories. Like horror movies. They said that settlers come here and light candles that float up in the air and move around. Childish things like that. So, I was so scared to go in there. Also, I heard there were some settlers living in there, so I was scared. I didn't know the truth. Nowadays, I still try to avoid it. As a kid, it was a scary place. As a young man, it was a political place. So, I tried to avoid it! Different reason, same result. Until now, I'm still trying to avoid it. I want nothing to do with it.⁶⁰

Once the center of social and religious life, filled with joy and celebration, Maqam Yusuf has become a place of terror, dread, and sadness.

Another young man, whose good friend was shot and killed one evening confronting the Israeli army at Maqam Yusuf, had conflicted feelings about the resistance to Israeli incursions at the site. Speaking of his friend, he said:

He got arrested when he was seventeen years old.... He was arrested for going out and throwing stones. I think he felt something would happen, because he told his mom – his mom always tells us this – the night he was martyred he said, “Mom, I feel tonight something good will happen to me.” This is what he told his mother exactly a few minutes before he was shot. To be honest, I don't think this is the right way. They do it because they love their country, but it's not the right way. I just wish the settlers could come and go normally. But then again, we have to resist the occupation. It's really hard. We can't let them just have everything easily.⁶¹

Echoing the sentiments of many others, he reiterated that he wished someday Jews and anyone else could visit the site “normally, like visitors, not like an army of occupation.” But for now, as a female youth explained, the Israeli settlers come with “full freedom behind the force of an army,” while residents of Balata al-Balad cannot even visit nearby Maqam Yusuf, let alone the holy sites of Jerusalem.

This ambiguity of longing for normality while also resisting the normalization of occupation was repeated by Umm Shadi when discussing the youth who throw stones at the soldiers and settlers during their regular incursions:

What can we do? The youth don't listen. But surrender isn't good either. If they don't defend themselves, who is going to defend us? That's the problem. I'm too afraid to defend myself. Maybe this one is sick, this one is old, this one is a child. Who is going to defend us? It's the youth. It's self-defense.⁶²

Many Israeli and Palestinian officials tout their security cooperation at Maqam Yusuf. Likewise, many Palestinian security officials with whom I spoke see it as their duty as Palestinian Muslims to protect the site. Nevertheless, many residents of Balata al-Balad feel under constant pressure and threat of violence and see youth resistance, whether admirable or annoying, as a symptom of the larger violence of occupation.

Insurgent Memory and the Politics of Forgetting

The oral history narratives of Palestinian Muslims reveal divergent perspectives on Maqam Yusuf. Taken together, these stories depict a dramatic break in religious and cultural traditions associated with the site, imposed mainly by the occupation and the intifada. As the site came under Israeli control, Maqam Yusuf shifted from being a site of spiritual and social significance for Palestinian women to a site of political resistance against occupation, mainly for male Palestinian youth. Though older respondents diverge in their views about whether the site is a tomb or merely a shrine (most contend the latter, though some say the former was once a prevailing belief), all interviewees of all ages agreed that the site is nevertheless of cultural, historic, and religious significance. As such, all agreed that it must be protected from damage and kept open to all regardless of religion or nationality, rather than being seen as the sole property of one religion. Though interviewees differed in their support or condemnation of physical confrontations with soldiers at the site, all viewed the occupation itself as the source of violence and the main obstacle preventing Palestinians from exercising their right to access this and other holy sites, including those in Jerusalem and Hebron.

Drawing on geographer Justin Tse's notion of "grounded theologies," that is, "performative practices of place-making informed by understandings of the transcendent," we can read Maqam Yusuf as made sacred through a combination of embodied social practices and transcendent understandings of place with broader religious imaginaries.⁶³ As some of the narratives above indicate, for older Palestinian men, the maqam served as a territorial marker used to map Qur'anic narrative onto the physical terrain of their surroundings, alongside sites such as wells and hills deemed sacred to local people even before the arrival of monotheist faiths. Adhering to neither archaeological accuracy nor religious orthodoxy, shrines such as Maqam Yusuf served as sacred sites for women, in particular, who congregated in them for communal worship and to pray for fertility or for the health and well-being of their families.

Whatever their social and spiritual significance in the everyday lives of ordinary believers, such sacred sites have come to play an important role in the lives of nations. Religious sites serve to establish “invented traditions” around which “imagined communities” can form in their search for a “desirable and recoverable past” and a “place in the world.”⁶⁴ They stand as *lieux de mémoire*, places vested with symbolic significance as the “memorial heritage” of national communities.⁶⁵ Maurice Halbwachs’s notion of “collective memory” emphasizes how societies continuously renegotiate memories of the past in a process that shapes group and place identity.⁶⁶ Certain places take on a “double focus” as a “a place in space and also a symbol or something of spiritual significance, something shared by the group that adheres to and is superimposed upon this physical reality.”⁶⁷ Together these physical manifestations of memory make up what geographer Karen Till calls “topographies of memory,” that is, the physical places that help give permanence to the ephemerality of the past, grounding narratives of collective memory.⁶⁸ People “learn to ‘remember’” through “social narratives and cultural practices” connected to these material mnemonic devices.⁶⁹ Stories and rituals help to solidify the link between these sites of memory and group identity, producing a sense of permanence and security. However, these habits of memory can be disrupted and thus open to contestation. As Till observes:

When everyday routines, political regimes, economic structures, and symbolic systems are in flux, the constructed “normality” of places – and their associated identities, power relations, and social practices – may be questioned. Localized struggles over the meanings, forms, and locations of places of memory are often tied to larger political disputes about who has the authority to represent the past in society.⁷⁰

We can read conflicts over spaces like Maqam Yusuf not as a conflict between competing religious claims or incompatible religious practices, but a conflict over memory, specifically a conflict between scriptural religious memory enrolled within a settler-colonial project on one hand, and indigenous religious folk memory on the other. The use of particular sites to conjure into being particular remembering publics necessarily draws lines of inclusion and exclusion. Through commemorative practices, powerful groups assert their right to narrate the past and imbue places with meaning. Nevertheless, marginalized and disenfranchised groups may contest such official narrations of memory through stories that keep alive alternative narratives and constitute what Foucault termed a kind of “counter-memory.”⁷¹

Against counter-memory tactics that continue to center “venues of official memory,” ethnographic, phenomenological, or psychoanalytic approaches might be used to analyze how “trans-generational encounters, performances, and rituals transmit and circulate understandings about the past across historical time and through social spaces.”⁷² Such approaches attend to the “multiple space times” of particular sites, examining the interactions between individual and social memory and how “stable material forms are dynamic in space and time” and also “how contestations over the significance of past narratives are given meaning within particular socio-

political contexts.”⁷³ In following this approach, this article raises the possibility that forgetting and erasure could also be a counter-memory tactic of resistance or, at least, self-preservation.

If counter-memory has been underexamined as a resistance strategy within the politics of memory, less common still are studies of forgetting.⁷⁴ However, amnesia is what one encounters when asking younger generations of Palestinians about Maqam Yusuf. Just as a wall of concrete and steel now surrounds the physical site of Maqam Yusuf today, a wall of silence surrounds memories of the shrine. The Palestinian youth with whom I spoke, born in the wake of the second intifada, know Maqam Yusuf only as a violent political flashpoint – a site of resistance where youth confront the occupation, or a place of danger to be avoided. None of the youth I spoke with knew of the religious and cultural traditions associated with the site. The silence about this site on the part of the older generations can be read as a form of self-preservation in two ways. Many of the elders described beautiful and happy memories at Maqam Yusuf, followed by the shock of its occupation and capture, and terrible memories of the violence that has since occurred there. No doubt, their silence about this site is a self-preserving trauma response. The adults from Jil al-Naksa recalled the religious and cultural traditions of Maqam Yusuf, but also tended to downplay them as the naive folk customs of women. They reject the idea of Maqam Yusuf being the actual tomb of Joseph, or at least treat such claims with ambiguity and skepticism. Memories of the site’s religious and cultural significance to Palestinians have been allowed to fade due to fear that such memories could be used to legitimize Zionist religious claims to the site and surrounding territory. Finally, detached from the social history of the site, local Palestinian youth seem willing to erase it all together, if it means relieving their community of constant incursions by Israeli army and settlers.

However, there are also inklings of alternatives to the settler-colonial temporality of erasure and its zero-sum contest over territory. Many of the older Palestinians who were interviewed long for a “return” to a time when the tomb could just be a tomb. That is, rather than deny the site’s cultural or religious significance, they long to see it resanctified, not as the exclusive property of one religion, but open to all. Some of the youth interviewed shared this sentiment, longing for an opening of this and other sites of religious, cultural, and historical significance to people of all faiths, especially Palestinians currently prevented from accessing them by Israel. The efforts of Palestinian scholars, village historians, tour guides, and heritage organizations like Sufi Trails in Palestine and Palestine Heritage Trail are helping to preserve popular memory of such sacred places in the face of their destruction, making them open to all.⁷⁵ The alternative to silence and amnesia is a narrative that upholds long-standing Palestinian traditions of multireligious shrine visitation and preservation.

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Endnotes

- 1 Interview by author, Balata al-Balad, 2 August 2018.
- 2 I will refer to the shrine as Maqam Yusuf throughout the text, as this is the term used most frequently by the interlocutors who participated in this research, and because the term *maqam* or shrine is an inclusive term that neither assumes nor excludes the possible presence of a tomb.
- 3 Yitzhak Reiter, *Contested Holy Places in Israel-Palestine: Sharing and Conflict Resolution* (London: Routledge, 2017).
- 4 Hans-Martin Schenke, “Jakobsbrunnen – Josephsgrab – Sychar: Topographische Untersuchungen Und Erwägungen in Der Perspektive von Joh. 4, 5, 6,” *Zeitschrift Des Deutschen Palästina-Vereins* 84, no. 2 (1968): 159–84.
- 5 Alex Shams, “Why Do Palestinians Burn Jewish Holy Sites? The Fraught History of Joseph’s Tomb,” *Jerusalem Quarterly* 78 (2019): 77–85.
- 6 See, for example, Melanie Lidman, “At Joseph’s Tomb, a Microcosm of the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict,” *Times of Israel*, 20 October 2015, online at (timesofisrael.com) bit.ly/45hqMZi (accessed 21 August 2023).
- 7 David J. Marshall, Lynn A. Staeheli, Dima Smaira, and Konstantin Kastrissianakis, “Narrating Palimpsestic Spaces,” *Environment and Planning A: Economy and Space* 49, no. 5 (2017): 1163–80.
- 8 Robert M. Hayden, with Tuğba Tanyeri-Erdemir, Timothy D. Walker, Aykan Erdemir, Devika Rangachari, Manuel Aguilar-Moreno, Enrique López-Hurtado, and Milica Bakić-Hayden, *Antagonistic Tolerance: Competitive Sharing of Religious Sites and Spaces* (London: Routledge, 2016); Robert M. Hayden, “Intersecting Religioscapes and Antagonistic Tolerance: Trajectories of Competition and Sharing of Religious Spaces in the Balkans,” *Space and Polity* 17, no. 3 (2013): 320–34.
- 9 Kirsi Pauliina Kallio, “Shaping Subjects in Everyday Encounters: Intergenerational Recognition in Intersubjective Socialisation,” *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 35, no. 1 (2017): 88–106.
- 10 Following Sherna Berger Gluck, Rosemary Sayigh, and Nur Masalha, I conceive of oral history as informing feminist and decolonial attempts to narrate marginalized counter-memories. See: Sherna Berger Gluck, “Oral History and al-Nakbah,” *Oral History Review* 35, no. 1 (January 2008): 68–80; Rosemary Sayigh, “Oral History, Colonialist Dispossession, and the State: The Palestinian Case,” *Settler Colonial Studies* 5, no. 3 (2015): 193–204; and Nur Masalha, *The Palestine Nakba: Decolonising History, Narrating the Subaltern, Reclaiming Memory* (London: Zed Books, 2012).
- 11 Those who were young during the intifada are also sometimes colloquially referred to as *jil al-hajar*, the generation of the stones.
- 12 For more on the intergenerational methodological approach taken in this research see Taylor Garner, Nadia Mansour, and David J. Marshall, “Intergenerational Intimacy Geopolitics: Family Interviewing and Generations of Memory in Occupied Palestine,” *Fennia – International Journal of Geography* 199, no. 2 (2021): 226–41.
- 13 *The Qur’an*, trans. Tarif Khalidi (New York: Viking, 2008), 183.
- 14 Shalom Goldman, *The Wiles of Women/The Wiles of Men: Joseph and Potiphar’s Wife in Ancient Near Eastern, Jewish, and Islamic Folklore* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2016), 119–21.
- 15 Richard A. Freund, *Digging through the Bible: Modern Archaeology and the Ancient Bible* (New York: Rowman and Littlefield, 2009).
- 16 Schenke, “Jakobsbrunnen – Josephsgrab – Sychar”; Loay Abu Alsaud and Amer al-Qobbaj, “Joseph’s Tomb: A Model of Traditional Islamic Shrines in Palestine,” *Near Eastern Archaeology* 82, no. 2 (2019): 114–23.
- 17 Denys Pringle, *The Churches of the Crusader Kingdom of Jerusalem: A Corpus: Volume 2, L–Z (Excluding Tyre)* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993).
- 18 Doron Bar, “Between Muslim and Jewish Sanctity: Judaizing Muslim Holy Places in

- the State of Israel, 1948–1967,” *Journal of Historical Geography* 59 (January 2018): 68–76.
- 19 Guy Le Strange, *Palestine under the Moslems: A Description of Syria and the Holy Land from A.D. 650 To 1500* (New York: Cosimo, 2010); Pringle, *Churches of the Crusader Kingdom*; Alsaud and Al-Qobbaj, “Joseph’s Tomb.”
 - 20 Pringle, *Churches of the Crusader Kingdom*; Schenke, “Jakobsbrunnen – Josephsgrab – Sychar”; Alsaud and al-Qobbaj, “Joseph’s Tomb.”
 - 21 Henry Maundrell, *A Journey from Aleppo to Jerusalem, at Easter, A.D. 1697* (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1845).
 - 22 Writing from the time affords the peasantry paternalistic affection, valuing them to the extent that they help to satisfy the biblical curiosity of Christian and, later, Jewish Zionists. French archaeologist M. Clermont Ganneau, for example, saw the Arab peasantry in Palestine as a source of valuable ethnographic information about the ancient past, viewing them as an idyllic bulwark against the forward march of modern progress. See Glenn Bowman, “Sharing and Exclusion: The Case of Rachel’s Tomb,” *Jerusalem Quarterly* 58 (2014): 30–49.
 - 23 Taylor writes: “The present monument is a place of resort not only for Jews and Christians but Mohammedans and Samaritans; all of whom concur in the belief that it stands on the verifiable spot where the patriarch was buried.” William Cooke Taylor, *Illustrations of the Bible from the Monuments of Egypt* (London: Charles Tilt, 1838), 205. Taylor’s account was famously illustrated in an 1839 lithograph by the Scottish Orientalist painter David Roberts. On Taylor’s influence, see Shams, “Why Do Palestinians.”
 - 24 Mark Twain, *The Innocents Abroad: Or, The New Pilgrims’ Progress, Being Some Account of the Steamship Quaker City’s Pleasure Excursion to Europe and the Holy Land* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1911), 291.
 - 25 Bowman, “Sharing and Exclusion,” 30–31. According to British sources from the Mandate period, some eight hundred shrines dotted Palestine’s cultural landscape. Today, no more than about seventy shrines still stand in present-day Israel, along with about one hundred in the West Bank and Gaza. See: Seth J. Frantzman and Doron Bar, “Mapping Muslim Sacred Tombs in Palestine During the Mandate Period,” *Levant* 45, no. 1 (April 2013): 96–111; and Mahmoud Yazbak, “Holy Shrines (Maqamat) in Modern Palestine/Israel and the Politics of Memory,” in *Holy Places in the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict: Confrontation and Co-existence*, ed. Marshall J. Breger, Yitzhak Reiter, and Leonard Hammer (London: Routledge, 2009), 243–60.
 - 26 Neil Asher Silberman, *Digging for God and Country: Exploration, Archeology, and the Secret Struggle for the Holy Land, 1799–1917* (New York: Doubleday, 1990); and Albert Glock, “Archaeology as Cultural Survival: The Future of the Palestinian Past,” *Journal of Palestine Studies* 23, no. 3 (1994): 70–84. Organizations like the British Palestine Exploration Fund (founded in 1865) and the American Palestine Exploration Society (founded in 1870) privileged a Judeo-Christian narrative of history of the Holy Land that drew upon the folk knowledge of the Muslim majority population, while essentially erasing them as historical actors. See Ghattas Sayej, “Palestinian Archaeology: Knowledge, Awareness and Cultural Heritage,” *Present Pasts* 2, no. 1 (July 2010); Salah al-Houdalieh, “Archaeological Heritage and Related Institutions in the Palestinian National Territories 16 Years after Signing the Oslo Accords,” *Present Pasts* 2, no. 1 (July 2010); and Chiara De Cesari, *Cultural Heritage beyond the “State”: Palestinian Heritage between Nationalism and Transnationalism* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University, 2009).
 - 27 Interview by author, Balata al-Balad, 24 July 2019.
 - 28 Sayej, “Palestinian Archaeology, 60.
 - 29 See: Amos Elon, *A Blood-Dimmed Tide: Dispatches from the Middle East* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997); Bruce G. Trigger, “Alternative Archaeologies: Nationalist, Colonialist, Imperialist,” *Man* 19, no. 3 (1984): 355–70; and Meron Benvenisti, *Sacred Landscape: The Buried History of the Holy Land since 1948* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000).
 - 30 Bar, “Between Muslim and Jewish Sanctity.”
 - 31 Interview by author, Nablus, 25 July 2019.
 - 32 “Arabs on West Bank in Clash with Israelis,” *New York Times*, 5 December 1975, online at (nytimes.com) [bit.ly/46vveoc](https://www.nytimes.com/1975/12/05/us/05westbank.html) (accessed 29 August 2023).
 - 33 Article 32, “Israeli-Palestinian Interim Agreement – Annex III,” Israeli Ministry of

- Foreign Affairs, 28 September 1995, online at (gov.il) bit.ly/3Q213Q6 (accessed 29 August 2023).
- 34 Serge Schmemmann, “50 Are Killed as Clashes Widen from West Bank to Gaza Strip,” *New York Times*, 27 September 1996, online at (nytimes.com) bit.ly/3RLzonP (accessed 29 August 2023).
- 35 Deborah Sontag, “A Biblical Patriarch’s Tomb Becomes a Battleground,” *New York Times*, 4 October 2000, online at (nytimes.com) bit.ly/46AniSL (accessed 29 August 2023).
- 36 Interview by author, Nablus District Coordination and Liaison Office near Huwara, 31 August 2019.
- 37 Reiter, *Contested Holy Places*, 2017
- 38 Ron E. Hassner, *War on Sacred Grounds* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2009), 3. See also Ron E. Hassner, “‘To Halve and to Hold’: Conflicts over Sacred Space and the Problem of Indivisibility,” *Security Studies* 12, no. 4 (2003): 1–33.
- 39 Dan Rabinowitz, *Overlooking Nazareth: The Ethnography of Exclusion in Galilee* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997).
- 40 See: Glenn Bowman, *Sharing the Sacra: The Politics and Pragmatics of Intercommunal Relations around Holy Places* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2012); Bowman, “Sharing and Exclusion”; Glenn Bowman, “Nationalizing the Sacred: Shrines and Shifting Identities in the Israeli-Occupied Territories,” *Man* 28, no. 3 (1993): 431–60; and Michael Dumper, *The Politics of Sacred Space: The Old City of Jerusalem in the Middle East Conflict* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2002). Also: Dionigi Albera and Maria Couroucli, eds., *Sharing Sacred Spaces in the Mediterranean: Christians, Muslims, and Jews at Shrines and Sanctuaries* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2012); and Anna Bigelow, *Sharing the Sacred: Practicing Pluralism in Muslim North India* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010).
- 41 Hayden et al., *Antagonistic Tolerance*, 70.
- 42 Hayden, “Intersecting Religioscapes,” 324.
- 43 Hayden, “Intersecting Religioscapes,” 322–23.
- 44 Hayden’s focus (in “Intersecting Religioscapes”) on the competitive construction and contestation over multiple religious sites across wider religioscapes, which draws heavily on experiences in the Balkans, privileges the perspectives of patrons and political or religious authority figures above the everyday practices of ordinary laypeople. The effect is the homogenization of religious communities, viewing them as having singular, coherent interests and agency. While competitive construction of religious sites is clearly apparent on the Bosnian landscape, several studies also point to a traditional ethic of everyday neighborliness, including assisting with the upkeep of shrines and sanctuaries from differing faiths. Either way, while there is a clear analogy between historic multireligious cohabitation of Slavic Catholics and Eastern Orthodox Christians, Muslims, and Jews in the Balkans, and Arab Muslims, Christians, Druze, Jews, and Samaritans in historic Palestine, both cases are distinct from the political conflict that characterizes Palestinian Arab resistance to European Jewish settlement in Palestine over the last century. See: Bojan Baskar, “Komšiluk and Taking Care of the Neighbor’s Shrine in Bosnia-Herzegovina,” in *Sharing Sacred Spaces in the Mediterranean*, ed. Albera and Couroucli, 51–68; David Henig, “‘Knocking on My Neighbour’s Door’: On Metamorphoses of Sociality in Rural Bosnia,” *Critique of Anthropology* 32, no. 1 (March 2012): 3–19; and Cornelia Sorabji, “Bosnian Neighbourhoods Revisited: Tolerance, Commitment, and Komšiluk in Sarajevo,” in *On the Margins of Religion*, ed. Frances Pine and João de Pina-Cabral (New York: Berghahn Books, 2008), 97–112.
- 45 See Stuart Charmé, “The Political Transformation of Gender Traditions at the Western Wall in Jerusalem,” *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* 21, no. 1 (2005): 5–34; and Bowman, “Sharing and Exclusion”; Bar, “Between Muslim and Jewish Sanctity.”
- 46 See Lorenzo Veracini, “Israel-Palestine through a Settler-Colonial Studies Lens,” *Interventions* 21, no. 4 (2019): 571; and Lorenzo Veracini, “The Other Shift: Settler Colonialism, Israel, and the Occupation,” *Journal of Palestine Studies* 42, no. 2 (2013): 26–42.
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- 49 Glenn Bowman, "Encystation: Containment and Control in Israeli Ideology and Practice," *Journal of Palestine Studies* 44, no. 3 (2015): 6–16.
- 50 Family interview by author, Balata al-Balad, 24 July 2019.
- 51 Balata al-Balad family interview by author, in Nablus, 25 July 2019.
- 52 Balata al-Balad family interview by author, in Nablus, 17 July 2019.
- 53 Balata al-Balad family interview by author, in Nablus, 25 July 2019.
- 54 Balata al-Balad family interview by author, in Nablus, 17 July 2019.
- 55 Balata al-Balad family interview by author, in Nablus, 25 July 2019.
- 56 The use of multiple similar sites by multiple religious groups was the subject of subsequent research and will be the subject of a separate forthcoming publication. This article focuses on the experiences of the majority Muslim population, paying attention to differences in gender and generation.
- 57 Family interview by author, Balata al-Balad, 24 July 2019.
- 58 The term *maskhara Juha* (Juha's farce) refers here to a story of the wise fool Juha who lent a nail to his neighbor, only to use it as an excuse to request more and more favors.
- 59 Interview by author, Nablus, 7 July 2019.
- 60 Interview by author, Balata al-Balad, 18 July 2019.
- 61 Interview by author, Balata al-Balad, 20 July 2019.
- 62 Balata al-Balad family interview by author, in Nablus, 25 July 2019.
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- 70 Till, "Places of Memory," 294. See also: Karen E. Till, "Memory Studies," *History Workshop Journal* 62, no. 1 (October 2006): 331; and Karen E. Till, *Place and the Politics of Memory: A Geo-Ethnography of Museums and Memorials in Berlin* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1996).
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- 74 Margaret E. Farrar, "Amnesia, Nostalgia, and the Politics of Place Memory," *Political Research Quarterly* 64, no. 4 (2011): 727; Katharyne Mitchell, "Monuments, Memorials, and the Politics of Memory," *Urban Geography* 24, no. 5 (2003): 442–59; and James A. Tyner, "Violent Erasures and Erasing Violence: Contesting Cambodia's Landscapes of Violence," in *Space and the Memories of Violence: Landscapes of Erasure, Disappearance and Exception*, ed. Estela Schindel and Pamela Colombo (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 21–33. In the Palestinian context, Israeli place-making has been predicated on the erasure of Palestinian memory and cultural presence. See, for example: Saree Makdisi, "The Architecture of Erasure," *Critical Inquiry* 36, no. 3 (2010): 519–59.
- 75 See the websites of Sufi Trails in Palestine (sufitrails.ps) and Palestine Heritage Trail (phtrail.org/) (accessed 22 August 2023).