

Living Islam in Jerusalem: Faith, Conflict and the Disruption of Religious Practice

Submitted by

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Signature:

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Abstract

Jerusalem—the third holiest city in Islam—is home to some 300,000 Muslims. But due to Israel’s occupation, they live difficult and disrupted lives. What might it mean for Muslims to practice their faith—on the ground, day by day—in such a conflicted place?

One way religion becomes a meaningful category in people’s lives is through ritual. Scholars of Muslim religious practice have been attuned to this insight and observed it in various contexts. But their analyses have often been predicated on an implicit and unquestioned assumption—that people who desire to perform rituals have the means to act on their intention in regular and routine ways. Scholars have also shown that when societies are in rapid transition—be they weakened or threatened—their rituals often evolve with them. In this project, therefore, I ask: what happens in Jerusalem when Muslims live under the existential threat of occupation and their ability to routinely perform religious rituals cannot be assumed?

I argue that when rituals are disrupted, Muslims are forced to improvise. Religious rituals—like the performances of skilled jazz musicians—are spontaneous and dynamic but also practiced and deliberate. Rituals are spontaneous in that they respond to the occupation’s disruptions, making physical and discursive adjustments. They are practiced in that Muslims draw from an established repertoire of themes that includes Islam and sacred space, nationalism and resistance, local culture and geography. I term the coalescence of these dynamics the “improvisation thesis” and explore three case studies where specific improvisations have different levels of resonance. The Naqshbandi improvise rituals to make peace, but they are discordant with other established themes; Ramadan rituals have resonance that define specific moments; and the improvisations of the *Murabitat* are deeply resonant, influencing Muslim rituals throughout the city.

Table of Contents

Religious Rituals are Rarely Routine	13
<i>Entering the Haram al-Sharif</i>	13
<i>Religious Rituals are Regularly Disrupted</i>	18
<i>Disruptions and Improvisations</i>	26
<i>Quandaries, Contributions, and the Roadmap</i>	30
Methods and Methodology	41
<i>Collecting and Interpreting Data</i>	41
<i>Methods of Data Collection</i>	44
<i>Personal Identity: Perceiving and Being Perceived</i>	55
<i>Conclusion</i>	68
Theory and Literature	70
<i>Conceptual Reinvigoration and Piety</i>	70
<i>Theoretical Tools and Innovations</i>	70
<i>The Empirical Gap of Piety</i>	85
<i>Conclusion: Theory and Piety</i>	103
The Repertoire of Themes	105
<i>Islam in Jerusalem: an (Un)disrupted Vision</i>	107
<i>Palestinian Nationalism and the Logic of Zionism</i>	114
<i>The Wars of Disruption: 1948 and 1967</i>	122
<i>Improvised Liberation: The Intifadas, Oslo, and Hamas</i>	125
<i>Stuck between Two Hells</i>	132
<i>Conclusion: Jerusalemites Belong to the City</i>	138
The Naqshbandi: The Dissonance of Peace	140
<i>Dhikr in the Desert</i>	140
<i>Sufism, Colonialism, and Global Landscapes</i>	143
<i>The Naqshbandi: History, Discourse, and Practice</i>	147
<i>Sufism in Jerusalem and the Naqshbandi Case</i>	150

<i>The Acute Disruptions of War and What Remains</i>	156
<i>Al-Bukhari: Allegiance, Authority, and Conversions</i>	160
<i>The Resonance of Ritual Improvisations</i>	164
<i>The Improvisational Effect: Dissonance</i>	176
<i>Conclusion: the Paradox of Patronage</i>	181
Ramadan: The Resonance of Protest _____	184
<i>The Murder of Muhammad Abu Khdeir</i>	184
<i>Aural Disruptions: Musahharati and Ramadan Cannon</i>	189
<i>Ongoing Disruptions: Iftar and Friday Pilgrimage</i>	195
<i>Ramadan 2014: Disruptions and Improvised Protests</i>	208
<i>Ramadan 2016: The Damascus Gate Celebrations</i>	226
<i>Conclusion: “We are Here!”</i>	235
The Murabitat: A Course-Changing Performance _____	238
<i>The New Virgins of Resistance</i>	238
<i>Israeli Disruptions and Societal Transformations</i>	241
<i>Genealogies of Ribat at the Haram al-Sharif</i>	249
<i>Rituals for God and Resistance</i>	255
<i>The Choreography of Disruption and Improvisation</i>	262
<i>Confrontation, Suppression, and Prohibition</i>	267
<i>Murabitat Improvisations Change the Performance</i>	272
<i>Conclusion: “We are all Murabitin” – For Now</i>	281
Conclusion: The Jazz of Religious Practice _____	286
<i>Jazz is Listening</i>	286
<i>Where Might This Be Going</i>	289
<i>Enjoying the Music</i>	295
Annex 1: Glossary of Arabic Terms _____	296
Annex 2: Research Participants _____	302
Annex 3: The Imam’s Supplication _____	311
Bibliography _____	313

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As a lighthearted postscript, I would like to thank Chick Corea for unwittingly inspiring me to use the concept of improvisation. Your lecture on YouTube “Improvisation Piano Exercises from Chick Corea” was the key.

Note on Transliteration and Translation

All Arabic words have been transliterated using a modified version the International Journal of Middle Eastern Studies (IJMES) system. No distinction is made between long and short vowels, and diacritics have been omitted. The standard convention of applying a (') for hamza and (') for the 'ayn is used. For names of people, places, and well-known terms, I use commonly accepted English spellings and the conventions set out in the IJMES word list (e.g., Saladin, Sheikh, Qur'an). For interviews in Arabic, I use the Palestinian colloquial pronunciation. Interviews were primarily conducted in Palestinian dialect Arabic. In rare cases when the interviewee had superior English skills, the interview was conducted in English. While I received some input translating certain words, all translations are my own. Except for public figures and those who explicitly requested to have their name used in the study, names of interviewees have been changed to protect their anonymity.

For a full list of Arabic terms used, see Annex 1—Glossary of Arabic Terms

List of Photographs and Maps

<i>Israeli soldiers block Palestinian men from praying at al-Aqsa.</i>	18
<i>The Dome of the Rock (Left). View of the Dome from within (Right).</i>	107
<i>The Wall under construction in al-Ram, East Jerusalem 2006.</i>	133
<i>The Nabi Musa Maqam south of Jericho.</i>	140
<i>The front door of the Zawiyat al-Naqshbandi in Jerusalem's Old City.</i>	153
<i>Rabbi Eliyahu McLean (Left), Abdul Aziz al-Bukhari (Right).</i>	162
<i>Al-Bukhari (center) and McLean (right) leading inter-faith dhikr.</i>	171
<i>Protests after Muhammad Abu Khdeir's Killing (Left).</i>	185
<i>The Shuafat Light-Rail Station the day after his killing (Right).</i>	185
<i>Raja'i Sandoqa loading the Ramadan cannon.</i>	194
<i>Prayer at al-Aqsa Mosque, the Dome of the Rock in background.</i>	199
<i>Women passing through Qalandia Checkpoint Ramadan 2015.</i>	201
<i>Outside Bab al-Asbat, the third Friday of Ramadan shortly before prayer.</i>	204
<i>Hundreds gather after prayers outside the mosque in Shuafat where Muhamad Abu Khdeir was kidnapped.</i>	212
<i>Video screen-shot of men praying on street outside bab al-Asbat while Israeli soldiers block access to al-Aqsa Mosque.</i>	215
<i>Israeli youth wave Israeli flags at the Damascus Gate for the 2016 Jerusalem Day Parade.</i>	229
<i>The Damascus Gate Celebration, Ramadan 2016.</i>	231
<i>Yehuda Glick showing a picture of the Third Temple to be built in place of the Dome of the Rock.</i>	248
<i>Women participating in ribat on the Haram al-Sharif.</i>	259
<i>Painting with temple replacing the Dome of the Rock outside a shop on the Cardo Street of the Jewish Quarter in Jerusalem's Old City.</i>	261
<i>Map: Physical Layout of Haram al-Sharif with Settlers' walking paths.</i>	263
<i>Young Israeli Men singing and dancing on the Haram al-Sharif close to the Bab al-Silsila where the Settler groups exit the compound (Left).</i>	264
<i>Israeli Youth waving an Israeli flag on the Haram al-Sharif (Right).</i>	264
<i>Murabitat being blocked from al-Aqsa Mosque.</i>	268
<i>Israeli soldier intentionally tripping a Murabita,(Left).</i>	269
<i>Israeli soldier shoving Murabita into a cement wall (Right).</i>	269
<i>Murabitat sitting in the Bab Hitta public sitting space.</i>	271

*My music is the spiritual expression of what I am:
my faith, my knowledge, my being.*

- John Coltrane

I'll play it first and tell you what it is later.

-Miles Davis

Chapter 1

Religious Rituals are Rarely Routine

Entering the Haram al-Sharif

Few people were waiting in line when I arrived at the security station adjacent to the Wailing Wall. I noticed two signs. One read: "Announcement and Warning: According to Torah Law, entering the Temple Mount Area is strictly forbidden due to the holiness of the site. - The Chief Rabbinate of Israel." The second sign read: "Food and drink forbidden. Afternoon visiting hours canceled on account of Ramadan."

As I approached the electronic scanner, I placed my wallet and keys in a small plastic tray. The Israeli security guard scrutinized my pocket-worn American Passport and asked more questions than usual. I answered. He waved me through eventually. When I exited the security station, the entire length of the semi-permanent wooden bridge leading to the Moroccan Gate (Bab al-Maghrabi) was covered top to bottom with Israeli soldiers in riot gear. I started getting unnerved as I navigated the labyrinth of legs, weapons, and bulky riot-gear. Were they going to stop me? What would they ask? What would I say? I pressed on. I was too preoccupied to notice the Wailing Wall below, a unique vantage point for the plaza. I passed through the Moroccan Gate and entered the Haram al-Sharif shortly after 10 a.m.

As soon as I entered, soldiers ordered me to move left. Visitors would not be permitted to roam freely, they explained. Other soldiers formed a semi-porous line about 20 yards away, enforcing the closure. They prodded me and the scant, handful of tourists along. I saw a group of Israeli settlers standing near one of the compound's exits ahead, though they were not exiting. Security hovered closely. Several Muslim women were shouting "Allahu Akbar" in the settlers' direction a short distance away. The tension was palpable. I overheard a tour-guide explaining to

an uneasy tour-group that the women were radicalized Muslim extremists and that it would be best if the group exited the compound.

While everyone's eyes were trained on the developing confrontation, I noticed a gap between the soldiers, took advantage and slid past. Moments later, I ascended the staircase leading to the Dome of the Rock, Jerusalem's indelible icon and Islamic architectural masterpiece. I noticed two young Palestinian guys gawking at the developing scene below. They were wide-eyed and curious. I approached them, "as-Salamu 'alaykum," They responded incredulously, "wa 'alaykum as-Salam." They wanted to know who I was and how I spoke Arabic. I explained that I was a researcher and that I had lived in East Jerusalem for several years. Not wanting to miss the moment, I pointed toward the scene below and asked them to explain their take. "These Jewish people want to destroy al-Aqsa Mosque, and the women are protecting it." The women continued chanting 'Allahu Akbar' at the Israeli settlers below. Soldiers soon forced the settlers out of the compound. Tension dissipated slightly.

After discussing the scene at length, the two guys told me they were from the West Bank. Israel wouldn't give them Ramadan passes, but they wanted to come anyway. They had jumped the wall in al-Ram early that morning. The more talkative one explained that al-Aqsa Mosque was their holy site and that as Muslims they should be able to come freely without Israeli restraints. I asked them how many times they had prayed in Al-Aqsa. The talker said three times. The reserved one said it was his first time. When the conversation lagged, I thanked them for the chat, and we parted ways.

I walked by the Dome of the Rock and made my way toward the Qibli mosque. An employee of the Islamic endowment (waqf) sitting on a raised stone block (mastaba) asked if I was Muslim. I said no, and he politely asked me to leave, explaining that visiting hours were about to end. I thanked him for the reminder and turned around.

As I walked away, the talkative guy from the stairs approached: “Why didn't you tell him you were Muslim? You could have stayed.” I invited him to walk with me as I explained.

“I’m not here to deceive people. I’m here to understand.”

“What are you trying to understand?”

“I’m trying to understand what it’s like to be a Muslim in Jerusalem, how the conflict influences people’s religious practices, the way their faith is affected on a daily basis.”

My response piqued his interest and he felt free to share his experience. He explained that he had seen the Qala’ Mosque near Jaffa Gate for the first time that morning. He loved walking through the markets of Jerusalem. He had visited Jaffa once as a kid, but he didn’t remember much from it.

We came to a standstill in the shade of the Dome of the Rock as he continued to share. A moment later his shy friend approached, and I caught him up on our discussion. I asked what his experience was like, being here today for the first time.

“This day is the most beautiful day of my life,” he responded.¹

Moments later, another waqf employee approached and told me visiting hours were over. The two guys walked me to the exit. We exchanged phone numbers and parted ways.

– Field notes, July 6, 2015.²

¹ *hayda al-yom ajmal yom bi-hayati*

² I have edited these fieldnotes for clarity and flow.

I went to Jerusalem in 2011 because I wanted to understand the Israel-Palestine conflict personally. I needed to see things on the ground through the lives of people on the street. I was fascinated, for example, by the women on the Haram al-Sharif shouting ‘*Allahu Akbar*.’ While their shouts may have been provocative, was it fair that the tour guide characterized them as ‘radicalized Muslim extremists?’ How did these women themselves understand their actions? What other dynamics might be in play? Or take my interactions with the two young men: How might jumping a wall have influenced their religious experience? When the shy one said “this day is the most beautiful day of my life,” did he have the politically subversive act in mind or was he merely conveying his feelings from having prayed in the Islamic sacred space for the first time? I came to Jerusalem because I was tired of the stereotype-laden comments of official tour guides and sensational reportage driving headlines. I wanted to understand what it was like to be a Muslim in Jerusalem from informal and unscripted discussions that emerge through relationships of trust.

By the time I started the PhD in 2013, I had observed the conflict disrupt almost every aspect of my Palestinian friends’ lives. I had also read studies scrutinizing the economic, social, and political dimensions of the Palestinian experience in East Jerusalem. But when articles and books discussed religion or faith, the topics were often construed as mere features of nationalism, radicalism, or mechanisms justifying extreme violence. Such accounts left me wanting. Jerusalem—as home to some 300,000 Muslims and the third holiest city in Islam—was obviously crucial from a Muslim perspective, but little attention had been given to what Muslims themselves do, feel, or think in the city. I needed to know if a Muslim could find personal value in practicing their faith. This was the puzzle I set out to solve: What does it mean for Muslims to practice their faith—on the ground, day by day—in such a conflicted place?

One way religion becomes a meaningful category in people’s lives is through ritual. Scholars of Muslim religious practice have been attuned to this insight and observed it in various contexts. But their

analyses have often been predicated on an implicit and unquestioned assumption—that people who desire to perform rituals have the means to act on their intention in regular and routine ways. Scholars have also shown that when societies are in rapid transition—be they weakened or threatened—their rituals often evolve with them. In this project, therefore, I ask: what happens in Jerusalem when Muslims live under the existential threat of occupation and their ability to routinely perform religious rituals cannot be assumed?

I argue that when rituals are disrupted, Muslims are forced to improvise. Religious rituals—like the performances of skilled jazz musicians—are spontaneous and dynamic but also practiced and deliberate. Rituals are spontaneous in that they respond to the occupation’s disruptions, making physical and discursive adjustments. They are practiced in that Muslims draw from an established repertoire of themes that includes Islam and sacred space, nationalism and resistance, local culture and geography. I term the coalescence of these dynamics the “improvisation thesis” and explore three case studies where specific improvisations have different levels of resonance. The Naqshbandi improvise rituals to make peace, but they are discordant with other established themes; Ramadan rituals have resonance of resistance that define specific moments; and the improvisations of the *Murabitat* are deeply resonant, influencing Muslim rituals throughout the city. My research shows that, while Israeli disruptions are frustrating and an ongoing source of distress, they are incapable of stopping Jerusalem’s Muslims from practicing their faith in ways they perceive as authentic.

I explain the intellectual and theoretical foundations for the study in this chapter. I outline the study’s contributions, aims, and limits. I then explain how I address the quandaries of writing about Muslim religious practices in Jerusalem. I finish by providing an overview of subsequent chapters’ contents and their contribution to the broader argument and thesis.

Religious Rituals are Regularly Disrupted



*Israeli soldiers block Palestinian men from praying at al-Aqsa.
Photo Credit: (Awad 2014).*

In Jerusalem, Muslim religious rituals are regularly disrupted. When they are blocked from praying in al-Aqsa Mosque, Muslims experience physical and spatial disruptions. Disruptions are temporary when Muslims are delayed at checkpoints and arrive late to prayer. They are also temporal in the sense that Jewish holidays are given preferential treatment when they overlap with Muslim holidays—Muslims are forced to delay and accommodate. Other disruptions are ongoing and pervasive like the entry quotas Israel has placed on Muslims since the 1990s, dictating who can enter Jerusalem for prayer on Ramadan Fridays. Disruptions occur when the volume of the *adhan* (call to prayer) is restricted, the *Musahharati* who wake Muslims for the Ramadan pre-dawn meal get arrested, and the cannon signifying the fast's end gets forbidden. These disruptions are aural, related to ritual's production of sound. Others are acute like the *Murabitin* who have been outlawed for defending al-Aqsa Mosque against the encroachment of Israeli settlers on the compound. Others still are diffuse and institutional like Israel's promotion of a specific version of Sufism that plays to Israel's political interests while undermining the institution's standing among fellow Muslims. Taken together, these disruptions show that any

Muslim who desires to perform a religious ritual in Jerusalem is never guaranteed the ability to act on their intention, at least not routinely.

But why is disrupting the rhythm and routine of rituals problematic? It is because rituals have a way of coming automatically once they are assimilated into the body.³ To illustrate the principle through a practical example, take learning to drive a car. New drivers painstakingly accumulate knowledge about road signs, regulations, and driving etiquette; but knowledge is never enough, they must develop skills through real-life driving experience. With time, the skill of driving gets worked into their bodies and novices become competent drivers. Eventually, they no longer think about driving—it comes automatically. Disruptions are problematic because they interfere with the way rituals come automatically. They interfere with the symmetry of mind and body. Disruptions to religious rituals are like unexpected road hazards.

Disruptions are also problematic because rituals are one mechanism by which faith becomes a meaningful category in people's lives. Marshall Hodgson defines faith (*iman*) in the Muslim tradition as "Religious faith; conviction; that which a Muslim acknowledges inwardly and outwardly through his actions."⁴ Faith, even in its definition, is comprised of an inward (cognitive) dimension and an external (bodily) dimension. Religious beliefs and practices are mutually constitutive and occur through a symmetry of mind and body. Such an observation may seem simple or self-evident, yet the Western rationalist tradition has been dismissive of faith as an analytical category.⁵ Faith and religion have been blithely discarded as elaborate forms of political mobilization; devices to assert, frame, and consolidate political interests. (In Chapter 3, I discuss how academic work on Jerusalem often falls into this trap.)

³ Daniel Winchester, "Embodying the Faith: Religious Practice and the Making of a Muslim Moral Habitus," *Social Forces* 86, no. 4 (2008).

⁴ Marshall Hodgson, *The Venture of Islam: Conscience and History in a World Civilization—Volume 1: The Classical Age of Islam*. (Chicago IL: University of Chicago Press, 1977), 515

⁵ Philip S. Gorski and Ates Altinordu, "After Secularization?" *Annual Review of Sociology* 34 (2008); Richard T. Antoun and Mary Elaine Hegland, *Religious Resurgence: Contemporary Cases in Islam, Christianity, and Judaism* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1987). Rodney Needham, *Belief, Language and Experience* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1972).

The trouble is that while Western scholars thought religion would fizzle out, becoming an archaic relic of a less civilized past, the very opposite has happened. The world has witnessed a global pietistic shift across religious traditions over the past thirty years.⁶ Faith has remained a meaningful category and scholars have begun to rethink their positions. Lara Deeb—expert on Shi'a Muslims in Lebanon—aptly critiques the dismissal:

...Faith is not a facade, not just a mystifying thing that we need to look past in order to understand what is “really” going on. Instead, faith *is* what is going on, it is a very real thing in and of itself, located in practices, discourses, inner and outer states, relationships, and effects in the world.⁷

While faith almost invariably includes a political dimension in Jerusalem, it remains a powerful force beyond the facade of politics. Simply put: faith is a meaningful category for Muslims in Jerusalem.

Seeing the shortcoming of faith’s dismissal, scholars have also begun paying specific attention to ritual practices. James K.A. Smith vividly illustrates the connection:

But the odd thing is that a lot of believers wouldn't know how to believe if they didn't have bodies. That's because they wouldn't know what to *do*. For those who practice faith, faith takes practice. And such practice is embodied and material; it is communal and liturgical; it involves eating and drinking, dancing and kneeling, painting and singing—all of which are impossible delights for a disembodied mind.⁸

The irony of Smith’s insight is that he is not discussing ‘religion,’ but the liturgies and rituals of the secular imaginary. But whether someone has ‘faith’ in the secular imaginary or Islamic religious tradition, the point remains: rituals link people into larger meaning structures in their lives. Rituals enable individuals and communities make sense of their

⁶ Gorski and Altinordu, "After Secularization?"; Antoun and Hegland, *Religious Resurgence: Contemporary Cases in Islam, Christianity, and Judaism*. Needham, *Belief, Language and Experience*.

⁷ Lara Deeb, *An Enchanted Modern: Gender and Public Piety in Shi'i Lebanon* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006), 40. Italics in original.

⁸ James K.A. Smith, "Secular Liturgies and the Prospects for a "Post-Secular" Sociology of Religion," in *The Post-Secular in Question: Religion in Contemporary Society*, ed. Philip Gorski, David Kyuman Kim, and John Torpey (New York: New York University Press, 2012), 160-61. Italics in original.

existence. And faith becomes a meaningful category through bodily practice. Disruptions are problematic, therefore, because they interfere with the internal coherence of rituals. The basic links between people's beliefs and practices are severed, and they are forced to adjust. The effect is the same whether disruptions are physical or spatial, temporal or aural, acute or diffuse, abrupt or ongoing. This is why Israeli disruptions to Muslim religious rituals in Jerusalem are both problematic and fascinating.

Before I explore the details of Israeli disruptions, however, I should explain what I mean by ritual, specifically. I base my understanding on David Kertzer's definition which strikes a balance between two ends of the spectrum, overly restrictive or too open-ended.⁹ According to Kertzer, a ritual is, "a symbolic behavior that is socially standardized and repetitive."¹⁰ The symbolic dimension of rituals distinguishes them from habits and customs and, since symbolism is at the definition's core, I must outline their three symbolic properties. First, rituals have the property of *condensation* of meaning; "*Condensation* refers to the way in which individual symbols represent and unify a rich diversity of meanings."¹¹ They draw together diverse ideas within a single symbolic form, whether the form is material (like a flag) or verbal (like a national anthem). The second property is *multivocality*. Like condensation, multivocality represents the variety of meanings that can be attached to the same symbol. One important distinction is that multivocality accounts for, "the fact that the same symbol may be understood by different people in different ways."¹² Finally, since symbols have no single, precise meaning, they have *ambiguity*. While on first impression ambiguity might seem like a

⁹ An 'overly restrictive' definition would confine ritual to the religious sphere, while a too 'open-ended' definition would include all standard human activity. By taking the middle ground, Kertzer is not compelled to classify rituals as 'religious' or 'secular.' This ambiguity is particularly useful for the current study because the lines between religious and secular (read political) are often blurred through disruptions discussed above. For further details, see David Kertzer, *Ritual, Politics, and Power* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1989), 8.

¹⁰ *Ritual, Politics, and Power* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1989), 9.

¹¹ *Ritual, Politics, and Power*, 11.

¹² *Ibid.*

weakness, Kertzer argues that “the complexity and uncertainty of meanings of symbols are sources of their strength.”¹³ The symbolic ambiguity of rituals is precisely what makes them powerful.

The second component of Kertzer’s definition is that rituals are repetitive and socially standardized. Their repetitive nature is why, earlier, I described rituals as having rhythm and routine. Through repetition, people become accustomed to them. The ritual’s meaning and purpose determines its frequency of recurrence. Within Islam, for example, some rituals are performed daily such as prayer; others occur weekly like Friday prayers; others recur annually like Ramadan or the Night of Power; finally, some happen once in a lifetime. These rituals are usually associated with significant life-events such as marriage, childbirth, and death. Whether they occur daily, weekly, yearly, or once-in-a-lifetime, rituals are repetitive and have an implicit routine. Rituals are also socially standardized because communities agree, generally, on the purpose and meaning of the rituals and participate in them together. In this sense, Kertzer’s definition is Durkheimian in that, “What is important about rituals, then, is... that they provide a powerful way in which people’s social dependence can be expressed.”¹⁴ Rituals allow people to form meaningful links with one another, expressing their social dependence.

Kertzer includes two further elements, rituals’ dramatic character and temporal structuring. Rituals have a dramatic character because they are conduits for emotion and have actors who assume various roles.¹⁵ As theaters arouse emotion through the use of lights, colors, interactions, and special effects; rituals, too, become a “means of generating powerful feelings.” This occurs when the symbolic power of a ritual intersects with the individual performing it.¹⁶ Rituals are powerful

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ *Ritual, Politics, and Power*, 9.

¹⁵ The performative element of ritual is significant, and scholars have treated the topic at length. See, for example, Richard Schechner, *Performance Theory* (New York: Routledge 2004 [1977]); Erving Goffman, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (New York: Penguin, 1956 [1990]); Judith Butler, *Notes toward a Performative Theory of Assembly*. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2015).

¹⁶ Kertzer, *Ritual, Politics, and Power*, 11.

because they are conduits of emotion. The dramatic element of rituals also allows people to play various roles. People can be actors or in the audience.¹⁷ A bride and groom, for example, are actors performing their wedding vows in the presence of their community to demonstrate their symbolic commitment to the institution of marriage. The ritual is a symbolic demonstration that others should, henceforth, identify the two as married. The intended audience of a ritual can also be the self. The bride uses the wedding to tell herself she is married, and the groom does the same. If the couple is religious, they might include prayers or specific blessings in the ceremony. Then God is made an audience, and the ritual becomes religious.¹⁸ The lines between actors and audiences are not as straightforward as I have drawn them here, however. Continuing with the wedding analogy, the bride and groom's use of religious language might not, ultimately, be directed toward God but toward religious family members who are apprehensive about the marriage. The example is telling because it underscores the complexity of rituals and highlights the dynamics of *multivocality* and *ambiguity* described above. Actors and audiences can understand and interpret rituals in various ways. Rituals, after all, are "action[s] wrapped in a web of symbolism."¹⁹

Rituals also include an element of temporal structuring, "linking the past to the present and the present to the future."²⁰ Kertzer explains how, in this way, rituals "tame time" and "define reality:"

One of the perennial problems people face is coping with the frustrating indeterminacy of the world. People respond by doing what they can to fix a single, known reality so they can know what behavior is appropriate and so that they can understand their place in the world. The very fixity and timelessness of rituals are reassuring parts of this attempt to tame time and define reality.²¹

¹⁷ Technically, there are also producers, managers, and various other roles, but evaluating their significance is beyond the study's scope.

¹⁸ Scholars have defined religious rituals variously. See, for example, Smith who defines religious rituals as those of 'ultimate concern.' "Secular Liturgies and the Prospects for a "Post-Secular" *Sociology of Religion*," 175.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ *Ritual, Politics, and Power*, 9-10.

²¹ *Ritual, Politics, and Power*, 10.

Since rituals link the past and the future through bodily practice in the present, the world makes sense when a ritual is being performed. Rituals help give orientation to people's lives. They allow people to have a sense of permanency in an otherwise indeterminate world. The point explains why people perceive rituals to have an eternal dimension and why they present themselves as fixed and changeless.

The perceived fixity of rituals betrays their changeability, however. Three examples from Jerusalem—one from each religious tradition—illustrate the point, succinctly. Muslims faced Jerusalem for prayer 1400 years ago—today they face Mecca. Jews worshiped on the Mount of Olives approximately 300 years ago—today their preferred site is the Western Wall.²² Protestant Christians worshiped at the Church of the Holy Sepulchre 180 years ago—today they would rather pray at the Garden Tomb because the Holy Sepulchre was “an unnatural setting for contemplation and prayer.”²³ While religious rituals tend to feel eternal and fixed to those performing them, the rituals, in fact, evolve with time.

To Kertzer's typology of ritual, I add another element to the present study: the physical geographic context. In Jerusalem, where conflict over the use of space pervades the city, the physical location where the rituals are performed shapes the meaning Muslims attribute to them. If, for example, someone prays at Qalandia Checkpoint, the ritual easily takes on a resonance of resistance because checkpoints are physical manifestations of Israel's occupation. This point has both general and particular applications. Generally, since the physical features of any given space (the natural and built environments) shape people's understanding and experience of that space, the meanings and emotive possibilities of rituals performed within them are influenced directly by the physical location. The point holds throughout the study.

The physical geographic context also has a particular application since Jerusalem a sacred city. Sacred spaces “are religious centers at which the heavenly and earthly meet, a means of access between the

²² Rashid Khalidi, "The Future of Arab Jerusalem," *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 19, no. 2 (1992): 136.

²³ Sarah Kochav, "The Search for a Protestant Holy Sepulchre: The Garden Tomb in Nineteenth-Century Jerusalem," *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 46, no. 2 (1995): 280.

human and the divine world.”²⁴ In Jerusalem’s Old City alone, there are between 225 and 300 holy sites.²⁵ Few other cities (if any) have such a concentration of sacred geography. The most important sacred space for Muslims is al-Aqsa Mosque (The Farthest Mosque), the third holiest site in Islam. The Mosque derives its sacredness from its association with Muhammad’s Night Journey, recorded in the Qur’an, *surat al-‘Isra’ 17:1*. The sacred sight is comprised of a 144 dunum (approximately 36 acres) plaza and includes multiple architectural features (buildings, walls, arches, courtyards, and passageways) with particular discursive significance. The Dome of the Rock and *Qibli* Mosque are the two most important sites on the compound. In common parlance, al-Aqsa Mosque is also referred to as the Haram al-Sharif (The Noble Sanctuary). While a detailed account of this space is critical to the present study, I leave further discussion for subsequent chapters, particularly Chapter 4.

The significance of al-Aqsa Mosque is further compounded because the site is sacred for Jews, too. Within Judaism, the location is called the Har ha-bayt (The Temple Mount), the foundation upon which the first and second Jewish Temples were built.²⁶ While Muslims and Jews both agree that the space is sacred, they make different historical, theological and legitimacy claims to it. As a result, religious rituals and their performance in this space are deeply contentious. The geographic context of Muslim ritual performance within sacred space is a theme of importance throughout the study.

²⁴ Ron E. Hassner, ““To Have and to Hold”: Conflicts over Sacred Space and the Problem of Indivisibility,” *Security Studies* 12, no. 4 (2003): 5.

²⁵ Michael Dumper, *Jerusalem Unbound: Geography, History, and the Future of the Holy City* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014), 99.

²⁶ Even the labels attached to the space stir virulent debate. What does one call it in a study such as this? I have chosen to refer to the area as my Palestinian interlocutors did—al-Aqsa Mosque or Haram al-Sharif. I use the labels fairly interchangeably as did most of my interlocutors. I recognize some may take offense by not, also, referring the space as the Temple Mount. No offense is intended. The choice aligns with the overall objective of the study—to understand, analyze, and present an understanding of Muslim religious rituals and how Muslims themselves understand them. Some scholars, attempting to sidestep the thorny issue, have begun to call the sacred space the Holy Esplanade. While I appreciate the impulse, the term seems contrived. See, International Crisis Group (ICG), “The Status of the Status Quo at Jerusalem’s Holy Esplanade,” in *Middle East Report* (2015).

One final contextual dynamic of rituals is germane to the study: the occasional and inevitable overlap of religious holidays. The exact dates of Muslim and Jewish holidays vary year-to-year since both calendars are calculated according to lunar calendars. Some years, for example, holidays are separated by weeks. In others, the gap is a few days. On rare occasion, holidays overlap entirely. In principle, the point is valid anywhere, but since Muslims, Jews, and Christians share such a dense physical space in Jerusalem, the issue is particularly complicated and sensitive.²⁷ Moreover, since the state of Israel administers the city, calendrical overlaps typically involve the disruption of Muslim religious practices. Several religious holidays overlapped while I conducted fieldwork in Jerusalem. The disruptions that resulted come out several times in the study.

Disruptions and Improvisations

I have, thus far, laid out my understanding of rituals and the core puzzle of my thesis—how does the disruption of Muslim religious rituals influence the way Muslims understand and practice their religion? I now turn to the core thrust of my argument—the ‘improvisation thesis.’ When Israel disrupts Muslim religious rituals in Jerusalem, Muslims engage in an ongoing and creative process that shapes what it means for them to practice their faith. They make physical and discursive modifications, and these changes influence the meanings they attribute to their practices. I argue, in short, that disruptions create opportunities for improvisations.

In a general sense, the disruption of rituals is almost inevitable. Disruptions are a mundane element of the contextual dimension of ritual activity. Someone praying in the presence of a crying baby, for example, experiences disruption. While the baby could be frustrating in any number of ways, the person performing the prayer has many

²⁷ To emphasize the contentious nature of calendar in Jerusalem, one author, Bernard Wasserstein, went so far as to include “Calendar among the six characteristic factors of communal conflict in Palestine during the British Mandate.” Roger Friedland and Richard D. Hecht, “The Pilgrimage to Nebi Musa and the Origins of Palestinian Nationalism,” in *Pilgrims and Travelers to the Holy Land*, ed. Bryan F. Le Beau and Menachem Mor (Omaha, NB: Creighton University Press, 1996a), 98.

options to rectify the situation: They can give the baby a pacifier or bottle. They can remove the baby from the room or hand them off to another able person. They can comfort the baby and return to the prayer after it has calmed. They could put on noise-canceling headphones or remove themselves from the room. People address these problems regularly and creatively. Taking this approach to human action, I align myself with the American school of neo-pragmatism (For details, see Chapter 3). Neo-pragmatists see humans as creative problem solvers where the ends and means of social action develop coterminously. As people face problems (disruptions) in their daily lives, they experiment and learn. They forge new, creative ways of addressing the challenges.²⁸

There is one stark difference, however, between the disruptions of crying babies and Israeli state: babies are harmless. Beyond the immediate context of their cries, they pose no threat to the person, the ritual, or its performance. There is no existential threat. Israeli disruptions are different. The relationship between the person attempting to pray and the disrupter is deeply contentious. Palestinians understand and interpret Israeli disruptions through the framework of Israel's settler-colonial project, a vast structural phenomenon that simultaneously aims to expand Jewish presence in the city and undermine Palestinian claims to the space (for details, see Chapter 4). Israeli disruptions—be they physical or spatial, temporal or aural, acute or diffuse, abrupt or ongoing—are perceived as a threat. And the ritual's core symbolic unity and coherence are at stake. But even while Israel severely limits Palestinian agency through the structure of settler-colonialism, the State will never be able to dictate the way Muslims practice their faith. Muslims will always remain in control of this.

Take, for example, the occasions where Israel imposes age restrictions on entry to al-Aqsa Mosque. When some young Muslims hear about this, they are incentivized to pray. They attempt to enter the

²⁸ I am grateful to Robert Janson for summarizing the contribution of the neo-pragmatist school. Much of this paragraph is a condensed version of his synthesis. See Robert Janson, "Situated Political Innovation: Explaining the Historical Emergence of New Modes of Political Practice," *Theory and Society* 45(2016): 325-26.

Mosque as an act of defiance—not because they are religious *per se* (they might or might not be), but rather because they see the disruption as an opportunity to express their protest. And since such rituals are *multi-vocal* (as I explained above), the ritual easily takes on the added resonance. But not all young Muslims are incentivized this way by the disruption. Others, when they hear of the restriction, might decide not to pray.²⁹ Israeli disruptions never compel specific responses; they create opportunities for Muslims to improvise and to play with the symbolic properties of the rituals they perform. This is why I have chosen *improvisation* to describe what Muslims do in Jerusalem when their religious rituals are disrupted. They use existing religious themes, discourses, and actions in innovative ways, and they draw from the symbolic properties of rituals (*condensation, multivocality, and ambiguity*) to enact their faith in ways they perceive as both authentic and legitimate.

On initial impression, improvisation might seem inappropriate because, in some cases, the term can connote haphazardness, a lack of forethought or deliberation. Someone who is said to be improvising could be understood as capriciously making up their words or actions.³⁰ This is *not* how I use or understand the term. In the study, improvisations are both spontaneous and dynamic, but also deliberate and practiced. Some may also take issue with the improvisation metaphor because it could misconstrue people's sincere intention to practice their religion properly within the broader contours of the Islamic tradition. For example, to claim that someone is improvising could, within a specific reading of Islamic theology, lead to the accusation of *bid'a*, the heretical innovation of religious practice.³¹ Being accused of

²⁹ Several interviewees express this attitude. See, for example, Personal interview, Qafr Aqab, September 30, 2015.

³⁰ In colloquial American English, similar idioms include phrases such as 'winging it' or acting 'off the cuff.'

³¹ Islamic scholars and religious figures debate the proper use and application of the concept of *bid'a*. For general orientation to the debate, see Muhammad Mustaqim Mohd Zarif et al., "Creating Creative and Innovative Muslim Society: Bid'Ah as an Approach," *Asian Social Science* 9, no. 11 (2013); Cameron Iqbal, "Assessing Creativity and Innovation in Islam," *The International Journal of Religion and Spirituality in Society* 7, no. 3 (2017).

heresy is a serious issue, and I have no intention of implying that Muslims in Jerusalem are doing this by framing the adjustment of their religious practices as improvisations. On the contrary, I mean explicitly that improvisations are primarily the result of Israeli disruptions to Muslim ritual activities and that they are linked to the innate human capacity to respond to new circumstances creatively.

Putting possible objections aside, those familiar with the idiom of jazz improvisation will intuitively grasp the value of the concept. While spontaneity and creativity are core components of the musical idiom, practice and planning are equally important. You cannot hand someone a saxophone and throw them on stage with Chick Corea and expect something great.³² Improvisation is a learned skill that takes deliberate practice. In jazz-speak, this is called woodshedding. One method of woodshedding is imitating the famous jazz legends. Students take the compositions and solos of their favorite musicians and transcribe them note-for-note. They make observations. Look for themes. Find patterns. They break the piece down, keeping an eye out for chords, chord-changes, arpeggios, passing notes, melodic shifts, embellishments, and frills—the list goes on. Improvisation is learned through imitation. Another woodshedding tactic is to make recordings of one's own improvisations. While playing recordings back, musicians look for awkward phrases, clunky transitions, and problem-spots. They devise solutions and repeat the process. Skill develops with repetition. And the process is very deliberate, taking years of practice. Malcolm Gladwell popularized the notion that it takes 10,000 hours of deliberate practice to become an expert performer.³³ Thus, when the skilled jazz performer takes the stage, they do so ready with a repertoire of themes, motifs, and techniques they can draw from spontaneously.

I have emphasized the role of practice deliberately. While I argue that people's creative capacity is vast, they rarely invent religious rituals without reference to the broader contours of a preexisting religious

³² Although... Chick Corea is very skilled and often improvises very abstractly... so, potentially, it could turn into something cool. But I digress.

³³ Malcolm Gladwell, *Outliers: The Story of Success* (New York: Little, Brown and Company, 2008).

tradition. Kertzer argues along similar lines; “even where individuals invent new rituals, they create them largely out of a stockpile of preexisting symbols, and the rituals become established not because of the psychic processes of the inventor but because of the social circumstances of the people who participate in the new rite.”³⁴ In other words, the creative impulse is connected to the broader repertoire of discourses and practices that the religious tradition provides. The improvised ritual would seem foreign or inauthentic otherwise. Yet flexibility remains, as Kertzer explains: “Rituals do change in form, in symbolic meaning, and in social effects; new rituals arise and old rituals fade away. These changes come through individual creative activity. People, in short, are not just slaves of ritual, or slaves of symbols, they are also molders and creators of ritual.”²⁵

This is how Muslims in Jerusalem become ritual improvisers. By living in the city, they are immersed in a language of creativity, and they learn how to express their faith by drawing from various themes, motifs, and techniques that resonate. And since disruptions stem from Israeli settler-colonialism and are inseparable from their religious experience, Muslims are continually shifting and changing how they understand and practice their faith. And like jazz improvisers, Jerusalemites never know the effect of their improvisations until they are made—they may be discordant and fall flat, resonate and define a moment, or change the entire course of a performance. The Naqshbandi improvise rituals to make peace, but they are discordant with other established themes; Ramadan rituals have a resonance that defines specific moments; and the improvisations of the *Murabitat* are deeply resonant, influencing Muslim rituals throughout the city.

Quandaries, Contributions, and the Roadmap

Creating knowledge about Muslims, Palestinians, and Jerusalem comes with three quandaries: First, how do I write about Muslims—giving them the dignity of being human—when Islamophobia is such a prevalent and powerful thing? In America, people’s minds are often

³⁴ Kertzer, *Ritual, Politics, and Power*, 10.

filled with vivid images of September 11th. They imagine Islamic extremists and radical groups like al-Qaeda and ISIS. They are afraid because FOX News told them Muslims want to take over America and impose Sharia law. And, as of late, people are polarized by Donald Trump's call for 'extreme vetting' and a 'Muslim Ban.' Europe's relationship with Muslims is no less contentious. Muslim refugees are washing up on beaches and pouring through European borders. Europe is experiencing a massive demographic shift. And major cities always seem to be coping with the next terrorist attack. Whether in America or Europe, Muslims are a sensitive issue, and I am faced with this challenge—writing about them with dignity and respect.

My second, and related, quandary is writing about Palestinians: How do I convey their situation with humanity when such knowledge threatens Israel's ability to control the narrative? In the West, when Palestinians are discussed, information is almost always laden with a political twist. Sometimes it is blatant, other times, subtle and subversive. Westerners are told that Palestinian schoolbooks teach children to hate from an early age and that they are an invented people with no legitimacy to their indigenous, religious, or national claims. In America, politicians explain that Palestinians are hell-bent on throwing Israelis into the sea and that it is America's responsibility, obligation, and privilege to support Israel. The first picture I ever saw of a Palestinian (and understood) was a youth hanging out a second-story window, arms lifted in exultation, showing his blood-drenched hands to the euphoric crowd below. He had slaughtered an Israeli soldier. When Westerners think of Palestinians, words like extremist, radical, and terrorist often come to mind. The aftermath of suicide bombing, rockets from Gaza, and masked Palestinian youth pouring forth out into the streets directly into Western television sets and computer screens. Palestinians are stubborn and belligerent; neither willing nor capable of living in peace. Again, the quandary, how do I write about Palestinians with humanity?

My third quandary is about Jerusalem specifically: How do I write about Muslim religious practices, knowing the city is a lightning rod for religious opinions? Muslims, Christians, and Jews have deep historical

roots in the city, and each faith considers the city holy. Sacred sites, religious histories, and eschatological visions are fused to physical spaces. And all are tied deeply to people's religious imaginations. The result is massive investment in the city which aims to bolster or blunt one religious tradition or another, depending on the view or predilection of the investor. In a sentence, the city with inseparable links to religion, and whose name means peace, is deeply contentious. Is it possible to write about Muslims in Jerusalem and not have someone take offense?

Each of these quandaries is about knowledge production and representation. And while each issue—Muslims, Palestinians, and Jerusalem—runs amuck in Western Media, academics (anthropologists, sociologists, and others) have made vital strides, critiquing the biases and prejudices that pervade Western societies, writ large. They have developed an 'enabling vocabulary' that has sparked extensive discussion about the validity of Palestinians as a people, the legitimacy of their claims to land, and their national aspirations.³⁵ These scholars have shown how the knowledge created by settler-colonial societies serves their own interests by silencing the voices of powerless people.³⁶ To wit, these academic lines have given me the vocabulary and courage to prioritize the voices and experiences of the Palestinian Muslims I have studied.

This study draws from the 'enabling vocabulary' and makes contributions to knowledge in three distinct ways, theoretically, methodologically, and empirically. Theoretically, the study advances knowledge in the fields of the Anthropology of Islam and ritual studies. I point out an unexamined theoretical assumption—that people who desire to perform rituals have the routine ability to complete them. I posit that scholars must pay attention to the disruption-improvisation dynamic, as it changes the way people make meaning with the religious rituals they practice. Several studies have made passing allusion to

³⁵ Edward Said coined the term 'enabling vocabulary.' See Edward W. Said, "Permission to Narrate," *Journal of Palestine Studies* 13, no. 3 (1984): 35.

³⁶ Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "Can the Subaltern Speak?," in *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, ed. Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg (Basingstoke, England: Macmillan Education, 1988).

related dynamics (See Chapters 3 and 4), but this study is the first sustained attempt to hold them in focus. The study also challenges the dominant theoretical paradigm scholars use to study Palestinians. The constructionist position—that religion is little more than false consciousness—dominates. I reveal how this position overlooks the power of rituals to create meaning in people’s lives.

Methodologically, my study makes two substantial contributions. First, while Jerusalem has been thoroughly studied from various methodological standpoints, the city has been overlooked ethnographically. Reasons for the neglect are threefold, and I lay them out in Chapter 3. In short, this study adds to the small cohort of researchers producing nuanced and grounded ethnographic work on the city. The second methodological contribution is that I have used social media—Facebook, Youtube, and Twitter—to augment my ethnographic findings. When I initially struggled to gain access to al-Aqsa Mosque, I began following social media as an alternative way of observing religious practices at the site. Then as the fieldwork developed, I started using these materials to spark discussions with research participants. The method added depth and nuance to my research. While I discuss this method in Chapter 2, I have treated the issue more thoroughly in a forthcoming book chapter with Edinburgh University Press, titled “YouTube and Ethnography in the Middle East: Creative Access to al-Aqsa Mosque.”³⁷

Empirically, my study makes significant contributions to the fields of Palestine and Jerusalem studies. While other studies have focused on economic, political, social, educational, and institutional impacts of the conflict on Jerusalemites, few have elucidated the unique and diverse tapestry of shared meanings and lived experiences of Muslims in Jerusalem with specific reference to their religious practices. The study produces new knowledge about Israeli disruptions and the trajectories they open for Muslims to create meaning with their lives.

³⁷ Kenny Schmitt, "Youtube and Ethnography in the Middle East: Creative Access to Al-Aqsa Mosque," in *Researching the Middle East: Cultural, Conceptual, Theoretical and Practical Issues*, ed. Ilan Pappé, Lorraine Charles, and Monica Ronchi (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2019).

The specific timing of my fieldwork also opened a window for a unique empirical contribution. Between 2013 and 2016, Jerusalem underwent massive transformations; most prominently, the 2014 Gaza war and the phenomenon of the *Murabitin*. I am one of two ethnographers to have gained access to the *Murabitat* before Israel outlawed the group.³⁸ The religious practices of the *Murabitat* created ripples through Palestinian society, shifting in the way Muslims understand and articulate their faith and resistance to the Israeli occupation. The material has important significance for discussions about the politics of sacred space and ongoing conflict at the Haram al-Sharif. This study captures the transformations in detail and adds rich empirical detail to our knowledge of the city in this unique period. Finally, my work on Sufism makes a unique contribution. While the lack of ethnographic attention to Sufism is somewhat pardonable given that there are so few practicing Sufis in the city today, the case study is significant nonetheless. Several studies have treated Sufism in Jerusalem tangentially; none have focused on it explicitly. The only exception might be Ron Geaves' article "That Which We Have Forgotten." But Geaves himself acknowledges that his fieldwork was very limited—that his findings were tentative and provisional.³⁹ My study makes a valuable contribution to this neglected field.

Before I lay out the study's roadmap, four brief qualifications are in order: First, this study is neither a history of Islam in Jerusalem nor a robust treatment of Islamic theology about the city. While I consult historical and theological material throughout, I aim to understand how Muslims draw from the repertoires of history and theology to understand their religious practices today. As a result, some of my statements about Islamic theology and history may not be as clear-cut or settled as they seem. In Chapter 4, for example, when I state that 'Abd al-Malik's purpose for constructing the Dome of the Rock was to enshrine the

³⁸ Sarah Ihmoud is the other. See Sarah Ihmoud, "Gendered Violence in the City—Murabitat Al-Haram" (paper presented at the Center for Palestine Studies: Jerusalem Embattled, Columbia University, April 18, 2017).

³⁹ Ron Geaves, "'That Which We Have Forgotten': The Emergence of 'Traditional Islam' as a New Movement in Global Muslim Religious Contestation," *Journal for the Academic Study of Religion* 26, no. 1 (2013).

location of Muhammad's ascent to the heavens in his Night Journey, my claim is about how Palestinian Muslims generally perceive the history today. 'Abd al-Malik's intention is, however, a matter of extensive debate among scholars, and few link it to the commemoration of Muhammad's Night Journey ascent. Therefore, when I am aware of specific historical and theological discrepancies, I discuss them in the footnotes.⁴⁰

Second, I make no value judgments about the veracity or merits of different religious traditions and their claims to Jerusalem. Others have done this work.⁴¹ By focusing on Muslim religious practices, I have no intention of negating or denying the existence of other faith traditions in the city. An ethnography of each faith community—focusing on the connection between conflict and religious practices—would be a worthy task. Third, by studying Palestinian Muslims in Jerusalem, I do not intend to imply that Jerusalemite Palestinians are exclusively Muslim. There are also Palestinian Jerusalemite Christians. While they are a minority, they are no less important and diverse.⁴² They, too, have credal positions and religious practices that are influenced by Israel's settler-colonial project.⁴³

Finally, while I focus on Muslim religious practices, I—by no means—intend to imply that all Muslims in Jerusalem practice their faith with uniform levels of devotion, conviction, or piety. Dan Rabinowitz and Khaled Furani point out that “a major challenge associated with future research [on Palestinians] is to thwart the temptation to assimilate Palestine into the hegemonic language of the secular-liberal

⁴⁰ For further discussion of the theoretical basis of my choice to work with perceived history, see Chapter 3. For the specific historical and theological ideas that comprise the repertoire of themes Jerusalemite Muslims draw from to understand and practice their religion, see Chapter 4.

⁴¹ Two examples include Colin Gilbert Chapman, *Whose Holy City?: Jerusalem and the Future of Peace in the Middle East* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2005); Rivka Gonen, *Contested Holiness: Jewish, Muslim, and Christian Perspectives on the Temple Mount in Jerusalem* (Jersey City, NJ: KTAV Pub. House, 2003).

⁴² There are Greek Orthodox, Roman Catholic, Armenian Orthodox, Copts, Episcopalians, Lutherans, Maronites, Syrian Orthodox and a small fraction of Protestants.

⁴³ Palestinian Christians do, however, enter the study briefly in Chapter 4 on account of their involvement in the Palestinian national project. For a rich and textured ethnographic study on Palestinian Christians, see Bard Helge Kartveit, *Dilemmas of Attachment: Identity and Belonging among Palestinian Christians* (Leiden: Brill, 2014).

Islamophobic West.”⁴⁴ To tackle this challenge head-on, I argue the opposite—that Muslim religious practices and personal pious commitments vary substantially. And the diversity cannot be neatly laid out on a one-dimensional continuum with practicing and non-practicing at opposite ends. The continuum is multi-dimensional, complex, and rich (if a continuum is appropriate at all). I deliberately aim to defy the global hegemonic discourse about the uniformity of Muslims, their religious views, practices, and experiences. This is an important first step to recover their humanity.

Now the roadmap. I give a detailed account of my methods in Chapter 2. This project is ethnographic and qualitative by design. I lived in East Jerusalem for five years (2011-2016), immersing myself in the daily lives of Palestinian Muslims. I participated in innumerable Muslim religious practices. I attended Friday prayers, formal and informal religious study groups, and shared Ramadan *iftar* meals. I spent countless hours on the Haram al-Sharif and in other mosques. I interacted directly with 183 different people during participant observation and in ethnographic interviews. I spoke with Palestinian Muslims across the full spectrum of society; men and women, young and old, educated and illiterate, the devout and doubters. I conducted all research in Arabic except when the interviewees’ English was exemplary.

In Chapter 3, I explain the theoretical undercurrents of the study and demonstrate that there is a lacuna in the literature regarding piety in Palestine. In the first-half, I cull insights from the Anthropology of Islam and ritual studies, laying the theoretical foundation for the study. I outline the field’s appreciation for the diversity of Muslim expressions and sensitivity to colonial legacies. I demonstrate that while rituals had been an analytical focal-point for scholars, their study was neglected on account of theoretical paradigms that were dismissive of religion. I also show that scholars have renewed their interest in recent years, re-theorizing the role of ritual in creating meaning in people’s lives but no

⁴⁴ Khaled Furani and Dan Rabinowitz, "The Ethnographic Arriving of Palestine," *Annual Review of Anthropology* 40, no. 1 (2011): 485. See also, Lara Deeb and Jessica Winegar, "Anthropologies of Arab-Majority Societies," *ibid.* 41(2012).

study has been conducted in Palestine with this insight in mind. I demonstrate how the dynamics of disruptions and improvisation create fertile ground for conceptual reinvigoration for ethnographic investigation in Palestine. In the chapter's second half, I demonstrate the empirical gap regarding Muslim religious practices in Palestine generally and Jerusalem specifically. I examined ethnographies of Palestinians that address religion, particularly the work of Loren Lybarger. I evaluated studies on Jerusalem with political emphases and where religion entered the frame of analysis. Finally, I discuss ethnographic work in Jerusalem and noticed that while vital contributions have been made, religious practices have been neglected. Thus, my study aims to invigorate theoretical debate by filling the empirical gap.

In Chapter 4, I unpack the repertoire of themes from which Jerusalemites draw to perform their religious rituals. Each theme has a genealogy and informs the way Jerusalemites practice their faith today. I begin with the sacred texts of Islam and key historical events in Jerusalem that comprise the core elements of Jerusalemite's collective Islamic imagination. Muslims draw from these texts and events to cast an (un)disrupted vision for how the faith should be understood and practiced. I then explore how the repertoire of themes has been expanded to include Palestinian nationalism, resistance to Zionism, and Israel's settler-colonial project. I pay particular attention to the disruptions of the 1948 and 1967 Wars and their lasting effects. The next major repertoire-additions were the First *Intifada*, which added the theme of nonviolent resistance, and the Oslo Period that gave Palestinians the idea that grassroots mobilization could effect political change. I explore the rise of Hamas (the Islamic Resistance Movement) and the Second *Intifada* which gave Palestinians a discursively emphatic view of Islam and an added emphasis on violence. While emphases do not, technically, constitute new themes, they are important because they fill the memories of living Palestinians and shape their religious practices to this day. Since the lines between religion and nationalism, resistance and emancipation are inherently blurred, this material clarifies several of the political dimensions that influence

Muslim religious practices. I conclude the chapter by focusing on political, legal, economic, and social events that affect the daily lives of Jerusalemites. These disruptions are driven by Israel's settler-colonial project and are the final dimension of the repertoire of themes that shape the way Muslims in Jerusalem understand, articulate, and perform their religious practices today.

I structure the next three chapters around the jazz analogy—specifically the improvisational effect. When jazz musicians improvise, drawing from their practiced repertoire of themes, they never know prior to playing the note exactly what sort of effect they might create. The improvisations may come out discordant and fall flat, may resonate and define a moment, or change the entire course of a performance.

I explore a case in Chapter 5 where improvisations were creative and well-intended, but ultimately fell flat. The Sufi Sheikh, Abdul-Aziz al-Bukhari from the Zawiyat al-Naqshbandi, aimed his religious improvisations at fostering peace between Muslims and Jews in Jerusalem. He combined his authority as a Sufi sheikh with ritual improvisations that drew from the themes of grassroots initiatives, sacred space, religious hybridity, and peace to link people to the abstract vision of religious reconciliation and coexistence. And while his efforts resonated with some, they were ultimately too discordant to develop traction. Israeli disruptions in this chapter are primarily diffuse and institutional. Since religious institutions are one mechanism by which people come to understand and practice their faith, they have a collective outlook and get entangled with state politics. And Israel has disrupted Sufi institutions in one of two ways—suppression or co-optation. They have been suppressed by war or for taking anti-colonial stances. On the other side, Israel had disrupted Sufi institutions through co-optation by portraying moderate, peace-oriented Sufis (like Sheikh al-Bukhari) as the 'good Muslims' since the 1990s. While the frame has drawn positive attention within Israeli and the Western societies, the alliance has undermined Sufis' standing within their own community. In a sentence, disruptions were too contentious and improvisations equally

discordant to generate much resonance. While this chapter has a narrow scope, the next chapter is broad and inclusive.

In Chapter 6, I explore Ramadan in Jerusalem. Almost every Muslim in Jerusalem practices religious rituals in the sacred month whether they consider themselves pious or not. I first explore two popular Ramadan traditions, the *Musahharati* and the Ramadan cannon. In both, disruptions involve the production of sound and improvisations are primarily about keeping the threatened traditions alive. Next, I discuss the ongoing disruptions of *iftars* and Friday Pilgrimage and how Palestinians must improvise in various ways merely to perform the rituals. I then examine Ramadan 2014 where religious rituals were temporarily, but acutely, disrupted on account of the Gaza War. I compare two case studies—*Salat al-Fajr* at al-Aqsa's Gate and the 48k Night of Power March—arguing that the former was a religious ritual turned catharsis of solidarity and that the latter was a planned protest that made opportune use of religious themes. Both cases were improvisational and drew together multiple themes to create moments with immense resonance. I conclude the chapter by analyzing a counter-intuitive response to disruption: celebration. During Ramadan 2016, Jerusalemites created an improvised ritual through the Damascus Gate Celebrations. They affirmed their shared solidarities by celebrating in a public space together. And these celebrations, too, had a resonance that defined the moment. Thus, this chapter is primarily about the second improvisational effect, improvisations with moment-defining resonance.

In the final case study (Chapter 7), I explore improvisations that changed the course of the performance. I contend that Israeli disruptions and Palestinian improvisations at the Haram al-Sharif led to the phenomenon now known as the *Murabitat*. The Israeli State has disrupted the Status Quo on the Haram al-Sharif, and Palestinians—compelled to defend the Mosque—have improvised new religious discourses and practices to resist those disruptions. The disruption-improvisation dynamic in this chapter is, thus, neither isolated nor discrete, but connected to the ongoing choreography between Israelis

and Palestinians at the Haram al-Sharif. While men (the *Murabitoun*) have been involved, I focus primarily on the women (the *Murabitat*) because gender was a major contributing factor to the group's influence. Israel's violent transgressions of their sacred, feminine honor bolstered their prestige. And while the *Murabitat* have clear political significance, I maintain that the women involved understand their actions as sincere faith expressions. Resistance is well-established in the Palestinian repertoire of themes, and the *Murabitat*—by their presence, their voices, and their bodies—have added to the Palestinian repertoire of peaceful resistance. They have sparked a discursive shift—that “We are all *Murabitin*,” that is, all Muslims in Palestine. This is how they have changed the entire course of the performance.

In Chapter 8, I conclude the study by briefly summarizing its findings. I consider the implications of my findings and where the contributions may lead. I discuss further case studies in Jerusalem where the disruption-improvisation mechanism could be useful. Finally, I offer a personal note about the importance of enjoying the music.

Chapter 2

Methods and Methodology

Huwa wahad minna wa wahad fina (He's one of Us).

- *Marwan, my barber, introducing me to barbershop patrons.*

Collecting and Interpreting Data

This project is an ethnography of Muslim religious practices in Jerusalem, how they are influenced by conflict in the city. While definitions of ethnographic research vary, I have chosen to center my understanding of the practice around two axial processes—the collection of data and its interpretation. I adopt Martyn Hammersley and Paul Atkinson's definition of the data collection task:

...ethnography usually involves the researcher participating, overtly or covertly, in people's daily lives for an extended period of time, watching what happens, listening to what is said, and/or asking questions through informal and formal interviews, collecting documents and artifacts—in fact, gathering whatever data are available to throw light on the issues that are the emerging focus of inquiry.⁴⁵

Ethnography, as a method of data collection, allowed me to develop a rich and textured understanding of the daily lives of Palestinian Muslims in Jerusalem and their religious practices. Elia Zureik has pointed out that ethnography is a particularly useful tool for researching Palestinians because they inhabit such complex and constantly evolving environments.⁴⁶ I have developed the improvisation thesis to foreground this complexity, and ethnography has allowed me to capture the constantly evolving way Muslims in Jerusalem understand and practice their faith.

⁴⁵ Martyn Hammersley and Paul Atkinson, *Ethnography: Principles in Practice* (New York, NY: Routledge, 1995), 2.

⁴⁶ Elia Zureik, "Theoretical and Methodological Considerations for the Study of Palestinian Society," *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 23, no. 1-2 (2003).

My research participants were male and female adult Muslim community members. I intentionally sought participants from a variety of locations, professions, and political persuasions. Some interviewees self-identified as members or supporters of various political and religious groups; others explicitly did not. I included Muslims who self-described as non-practicing deliberately. My aim was to side-step one of the criticisms leveled against contemporary ethnographies of Islam—that these studies have prioritized analysis of the actively pious to the exclusion of non-practicing Muslims.⁴⁷ While I gathered ethnographic material from a broad spectrum of Palestinian society, I cannot claim that my sample was representative in a quantitative sense. I am confident, however, that my ethnographic material was sufficiently extensive and rigorous to form the basis of a substantive qualitative study.

I conducted 239 ethnographic interviews. I interviewed some people once and others multiple times. In total, I interviewed 108 different people. 90 of my interviewees were men, while 18 were women. I made audio recordings of 68 interviews, conducted 8 focus-groups, and interviewed 4 couples together. During times of participant observation, I made notes of interactions with 74 additional people (57 men and 17 women); none of which turned into spontaneous ethnographic interviews or ongoing relationships. In total, I interacted with 183 different people for this study, 147 men (80%) and 36 women (20%). I give a full account of my ethnographic methods in the next section. In Annex 2, I have included a list of participants' anonymized names along with brief demographic information.

Interpretation is the second task of ethnographic research, and that flows through the medium of writing. On the basis of my experiences and notes taken in the field, I developed what Clifford Geertz called 'thick descriptions,'⁴⁸ Thick descriptions are a writing product which describes people's behaviors in detail, with an aim toward

⁴⁷ Deeb and Winegar, "Anthropologies of Arab-Majority Societies," 544-45.

⁴⁸ Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York: Basic Book, Inc. Publishers, 1973), 5-6, 9-10.

grasping the meaning they attribute to their activities by locating them within specific contexts. These thick descriptions became the building-blocks of my interpretive process. Analysis was inductive and occurred throughout the research project. I was conscious of Emerson's point that:

All writing, even seemingly straightforward descriptive writing, is a construction. Through his choice of words and method of organization, a writer presents a *version* of the world. As a selective and creative activity, writing always functions more as a filter than a mirror reflecting the “reality” of events.⁴⁹

Writing was, thus, the interpretive filter for my analytical process. Moreover, since I aimed to understand the meanings people gave to their religious practices, I gave scrupulous attention to their words and actions. I took what they said seriously.

After printing all my thick descriptions, transcribing and translating all my ethnographic interviews, I used an organic and immersive ‘open-coding’ process to analyze my data.⁵⁰ I built theoretical insights as I underlined, circled, and jotted notes in the margins of my printed materials,. Glaser and Strauss termed this analytical process ‘Grounded Theory,’ and it was my core analytical tool for this research project.⁵¹ In summary, this ethnography is based on extensive ethnographic research conducted over a five-year period (2011-2016). I used ‘grounded theory’ to develop theoretical insights and triangulated them with Social media and other resources to add to the study’s reliability and validity. I have divided this chapter into two primary sections. In the first, I give a detailed account of the methods I used to collect data. In the second, I analyze how my identity as a researcher shaped the content and outcomes of the research project as a whole.

⁴⁹ Robert M. Emerson, Rachel I. Fretz, and Linda L. Shaw, *Writing Ethnographic Fieldnotes* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 66. Italics in original.

⁵⁰ Robert M. Emerson, Rachel I. Fretz, and Linda L. Shaw, *Writing Ethnographic Fieldnotes* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 150-55.

⁵¹ Barney G. Glaser and Anselm L. Strauss, *The Discovery of Grounded Theory: Strategies for Qualitative Research* (London: Aldine Transaction, 1967); Anselm Strauss and Juliet Corbin, *Basics of Qualitative Research*, vol. 15 (Newbury Park, CA: Sage, 1990).

Methods of Data Collection

To collect data, I did precisely what Hammersley and Atkinson described above: I participated in peoples' daily lives for extended amounts of time, watching, listening, asking, interviewing, and collecting other materials. My goal was to understand what it meant to perform religious practices in such a disrupted space. In this section, I focus discussion around the specific ethnographic tools of participant observation, ethnographic interviews, friendships, analysis of social media, and inclusion of other sources. I explain how each methodological tool contributed to the broader aim of the study.

Participant observation is an ethnographic research method James Spradley describes as, "...observe[ing] the activities of people, the physical characteristics of the social situation, and what it feels like to be a part of the scene."⁵² He goes on to explain that the process moves through three-stages, beginning with descriptive observations moving to focused observations and then, finally, to selective observations.⁵³ Thus, an ethnographer using participant observation moves through a filtering process which begins broadly and ends with a specific, narrow focus. I used participant observation extensively during my fieldwork in Jerusalem. The method allowed me to make general observations about the lived experience of Muslims in Jerusalem and specific observations about their religious practices.

I used participant observation—generally—to observe people in their homes, sitting on buses, and waiting in line at checkpoints. I had meals in restaurants, drank tea and coffee with shopkeepers. I observed Jerusalemites on the street being questioned by Israeli soldiers. I watched Palestinians with West Bank ID's jump the wall to get to work or pray in al-Aqsa Mosque. I waited in line alongside Jerusalemites at the Israeli Ministry of the Interior, seeking work permits and birth certificates. I watched Palestinians cope with the daily

⁵² James P. Spradley, *Participant Observation* (Long Grove, IL: Waveland Press, Inc., 2016 [1980]), 33.

⁵³ *Participant Observation* (Long Grove, IL: Waveland Press, Inc., 2016 [1980]), 33-34.

struggles of life under occupation for five years. While I visited every part of Jerusalem, my movements were geographically centered around Beit Hanina, Shuafat, Ras al-Amoud, the Old City, and Damascus gate areas. I also spent extensive time in Al-Ram, Kafr 'Aqab, and the Qalandia and Shuafat refugee camps, each on the other side of the separation barrier. I had countless opportunities for participant observation in this general sense.

I used participant observation—specifically—to observe, experience, and perform religious rituals. I participated in religious classes, prayers, had *iftar* meals in Ramadan, attended weddings and funerals. I observed rituals, traditions, and customs that accompanied religious activities, such as *wudu'* (ablution) before prayers and gatherings to welcome home *haji* and *'umra* participants. I made observations about the physical dimensions of the religious activities: what people did with their bodies, who else was present and what they were doing, the material objects they used, and the time they spent performing the ritual. I also listened to their discussions about the ritual: what was its purpose and meaning, how the proper performance was debated, and who was making authoritative claims. When appropriate, I asked questions: how should the religious rituals be done? Why were specific activities important or necessary? What actions or states-of-being might annul the validity or value of the practice? I took notes on my iPhone or in notebooks when it was not distracting. I elaborated on the notes when I returned to a private setting. These shared rituals and religious experiences gave me valuable insight into the lived religious experience of Muslims in Jerusalem. Not only did it give me valuable insight into the lived experience of Palestinian Muslims and their religious practices, but also participant observation generated poignant lines of inquiry for my ethnographic interviews.

An ethnographic interview is a qualitative, narrative-based interaction between interviewer and interviewee used to gain understanding in a variety of domains: historical fact, personal experiences, attitudes, values, and beliefs.⁵⁴ I used ethnographic

⁵⁴ *The Ethnographic Interview* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1979); James A. Holstein and Jaber F. Gubrium, *The Active Interview* (London: Sage, 1995).

interviews in this study to generate clear, focused answers to my primary research question—how has conflict in Jerusalem impacted the performance of religious practices? My experience was similar to that of Joe Soss, who claimed, “the interviews allowed me to see the people I met as agents acting on their own self-concepts and standards, dreams and aspirations, fears and self-doubt, and histories of accomplishment and disappointment.”⁵⁵ Interviews allowed me to discuss the difficulties of life under occupation, their material implications, and emotional responses. They also allowed me to probe the meanings and narratives associated with people’s lived religious experience.

I recruited interviewees intentionally during times of participant observation and through the connections of colleagues, friends, and organizations with direct community ties. In this way, I used what Rowland Atkinson and John Flint have described as the “Snowball” technique, the method of asking interviewees to provide introductions or leads for other possible interviewees. While the method violates sampling principles in social-science research, it is particularly useful for providing, “a means of accessing vulnerable and more impenetrable social groupings.”⁵⁶ Palestinians in Jerusalem are a vulnerable population and, despite the limitation, using the method was effective.

My research abided by Exeter University’s ethical standards.⁵⁷ As far as I am aware, the project caused no harm, detriment, or undue stress on participants. I often found interviewees already sensitized to the challenges and risks associated with their involvement, the sensitivity doubtless emerging from their long-term experience in a conflict zone. In this sense, they helped me understand the various

⁵⁵ Joe Soss, "Talking Our Way to Meaningful Explanations: A Practice-Centered View of Interviewing for Interpretive Research," in *Interpretation and Method: Empirical Research Methods and the Interpretive Turn*, ed. Dvora Yanow and Peregrine Schwartz-Shea (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, Inc, 2006), 143.

⁵⁶ Rowland Atkinson and John Flint, "Accessing Hidden and Hard-to-Reach Populations: Snowball Research Strategies," *Social Research Update*, no. 33 (2001).

⁵⁷ I submitted the research frame and methodology to Exeter’s ethical review committee for research involving human subjects before fieldwork began. The university granted me permission on April 30, 2014.

ethical implications of their participation in ways I would have otherwise overlooked.⁵⁸

I conducted interviews in various environments—homes, coffee shops, restaurants, offices, park benches, and others—where interviewees would feel safe and comfortable. If they felt unsafe or uncomfortable, we chose another place. I began interviews by informing participants they were free to refuse participation and that they were entitled to withdraw their participation at any point, even after the interview. After a brief explanation of the research topic, I obtained their consent verbally. Verbal consent was deliberate: written consent (the more conventional method) would have been a distraction and hindrance—signing ‘official’ documents in a conflict zone could come across as coercive or manipulative, likely undermining the transparent responses I sought. After obtaining consent, I documented their response in my field notes or audio recordings (when used). I only asked to make an audio recording when I felt comfortable and perceived the interview would not be derailed. If someone was uncomfortable with an audio recording, I took written notes (sometimes in their presence, other times afterward). When interviews ended, I gave the person my contact information in case they needed to contact me. To protect my participants’ privacy, I anonymized all notes in my notebooks and publications. Two interviewees specifically asked not to have their names changed. I honored their request and point out these exceptions in the thesis.

Ethnographic interviews were semi-structured.⁵⁹ Semi-structured interviews are interactions where a researcher asks interviewees questions, eliciting information about a pre-determined set of issues. While researchers often have a list of questions, the semi-structured interview is conversational—deviation from the list is normal and expected. This form of questioning allows participants to play an active role in determining the interview’s content. After obtaining consent, I

⁵⁸ Elisabeth Jean Wood, "The Ethical Challenges of Field Research in Conflict Zones," *Qualitative Sociology* 29, no. 3 (2006): 380.

⁵⁹ Eric Drever, *Using Semi-Structured Interviews in Small-Scale Research. A Teacher's Guide* (Glasgow, Scotland: The SCRE Centre, 1995).

often began with demographic questions to get a sense of the individual's status, position, and social location in the community. These questions allowed me to orient myself and gave interviewees a chance to get comfortable with the interview experience. I then followed with more open-ended questions, designed to elicit longer responses and encourage free exchange. After the interview gained momentum, I moved to questions regarding their religious practices. I gave adequate time and space to explore the areas of faith my interviewees felt most important. When necessary, I redirected discussions with intentional questions; I did this infrequently, however, because I learned through experience that seeming tangents often led to rich and relevant material. Interviews lasted two or three hours, on average. Since I was in ongoing contact with multiple research participants, I often followed up later with further questions on separate occasions.

I also conducted 8 focus-group interviews. These interviews were both spontaneous and scheduled. Aside from addressing similar topics to my individual ethnographic interviews, focus-groups gave me a more precise sense of how various issues were discussed and debated among Palestinians. Additionally, I discovered I could gain access to female participants by interviewing them alongside their husbands. I used this method four times. Interviewing couples comes with particular benefits and weaknesses.⁶⁰ Regarding their benefits, the technique gave me access to women who would have otherwise been inaccessible. These interactions produced rich ethnographic material. Regarding their weakness, I left each interview wondering how and to what extent the husband's presence influenced the wife's responses. My suspicion of the influence was validated by my wife's experiences when she would interact with women in the absence of men (I return to my wife's role in the study shortly).

All interviews fit broadly into two categories, scheduled and spontaneous. Scheduled meetings occurred when the interviewee and I set up a pre-arranged time and location. Other interviews were spontaneous and began during participant observation. Here, I

⁶⁰ Margunn Bjornhold and Regland Farstad, "Am I Rambling?": On the Advantages of Interviewing Couples Together" *Qualitative Research* 14, no. 1 (2014).

deliberately make a distinction between ordinary interactions that occurred during participant observation and spontaneous interviews on the basis of the length and depth of communication. On numerous occasions, for example, what I thought would be a brief exchange turned into a lengthy conversation. Some of these discussions became full-length ethnographic interviews. Others lead to ongoing friendships.

I developed many friendships with Palestinians which continued throughout the research process. They made a vital contribution to the study. They allowed me to probe their experiences, ideas, and opinions deeply during our frequent informal and unrehearsed interactions. We discussed controversial and troubling aspects of their lives in Jerusalem openly. They gave me backstories and context about the internal politics of community-life which I would not have been exposed to otherwise. But beyond their contribution in this way, these individuals became gatekeepers and partners. Gatekeepers, according to Margaret LeCompte and Jean Schensul, are, "individuals who control access to a community, organization, group of people, or source of information." While these friends had no formal control over access to the community, organizations, or other people, the open access they gave was invaluable.⁶¹ They graciously welcomed me into their homes and lives, introducing me to their families and networks of friends. They were major facilitators of the 'Snowball' technique described above. Their introductions were critical for establishing rapport and trust with new contacts.⁶² I often recall sitting in Marwan's barbershop, and him introducing me to fellow clients, "He is one of us,"⁶³ when I shook hands with this new person. This gave the new acquaintance confidence that I should be treated as an insider, and it gave me the confidence that my presence and participation were welcome.

These friends became partners in the research. Margaret LeCompte and Jean Schensul explain:

⁶¹ After officially beginning the research project and gaining Exeter's ethical approval, I formally obtained these friend's consent.

⁶² Hammersley and Atkinson, *Ethnography: Principles in Practice*, 77-78.

⁶³ *huwa wahad minna wa wahad fina.*

Partners are critical to good ethnography since they... help to identify and clarify the research problem...If community members, community leaders, and gatekeepers view the problem identified by the ethnographer as important...the researcher will find it easy to gain entry to the research setting.⁶⁴

These friends understood the value of my research from the beginning. They also helped clarify my research problem by generating avenues for further exploration or giving examples of ways the conflict inflected their religious practices.

Alongside these advantages, including friends in the research presented several challenges. First, because our relationship preceded the research, I had to guard against turning every conversation into a focused discussion of my research. Occasionally, I was reluctant to raise research questions because I felt it would change the dynamic of the moment, possibly making the friend feel used. I had to maintain the reciprocity of the relationship. The second problem was the occasional tension between our values. At the height of the Summer 2014 Gaza war, for example, Nour asked me point blank if I thought Hamas was a terrorist organization. If I said yes, our relationship might have ended. If I had said no, I would have been compromising my position that civilians should not be actively targeted, which Hamas was known for doing. But I had to say something. I equivocated—"I don't know." Nour was disappointed, and I sensed a loss of connection. Despite these occasional challenges, including friends as key informants enriched the study.

In this subsection, I give a brief sketch of these key informants and my relationship with them. I provide it for two reasons; first, because they appear often in the study; and second, to highlight the diverse nature of their backgrounds.

Nour, mentioned above, is an unmarried resident of East Jerusalem. He grew up in al-Ram but moved to A-Tur to keep his Jerusalem ID. After we met, our relationship developed because he helped me buy a car. He works in Ma'ale Adumim, an Israeli settlement,

⁶⁴ Margaret D. LeCompte and Jean J. Schensul, *Designing and Conducting Ethnographic Research: An Introduction* (Lanham, MD: AltaMira Press, 2010), 9-10.

and considers himself a devout Muslim. We had countless interactions about the meaning, content, and practice of his faith.

Mamdouh is a carpenter. He is married with three children and lives in Ubeidiya, just east of East Jerusalem. His wife and children have Jerusalem IDs but he does not. He is regularly separated from them because of it. Before spending seven years in Israeli jail for throwing rocks in the First *Intifada*, he was in Jerusalem regularly. Now, he is forbidden. Most of our interactions took place at his carpenter shop.

Marwan, from the chapter's epigraph, was my barber. He, too, is married with three children and is in his early thirties. He is the second son of a religious leader in the community. He has Jerusalem ID but chose to live in Qafr 'Aqab because his Jordanian wife is not regularly allowed in Jerusalem. I learned countless things about Islam and the lived Islamic experience from him and his fellow barbershop patrons.

Nisreen is a single college student who worked at the Common Word Institute which I describe shortly. She was my wife's language instructor for over a year. Her mother was my son's babysitter for a season, too. She is an active journalist; stylish, and intelligent. She is a passionate—though moderately practicing—Muslim. Her family roots are in the Old City of Jerusalem.

Ahmed was born and raised in Jerusalem's Old City but has since moved to Qafr 'Aqab with his wife and six children. After being successful as a clothes and apparel shop owner in his early twenties, his businesses have been crippled because of the economic effect of the conflict. He is now in his mid-40s and is grossly in debt.

Thus far, I have discussed three of my primary methods of data collection—participant observation, ethnographic interviews, and friendships. While they presented specific opportunities and challenges, each method generated valuable ethnographic data. I account for two additional data sources before discussing the various facets of my identity and their influence on the study.

I used Social Media—Youtube, Facebook, and Twitter—as a method for collecting ethnographic data. My discovery of their usefulness happened accidentally. While venting my frustrations on gaining access to the Al-Aqsa mosque with a prominent Muslim leader, he asked if I received the mosque’s weekly email.⁶⁵ I responded negatively and said I had never heard of such a thing. He then offered to add me to the listserv. I received an email the following week with links to over 20 Youtube videos from the previous week’s religious activities at the mosque—lessons, lectures, calls to prayer, the Friday sermon, and other gatherings.⁶⁶ On further investigation I realized that the channel had over 2,500 videos posted since 2010. I instantly had an abundance of material, rich for observation.

When I began exploring how Youtube and other social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter might enhance the research, I quickly found intellectual support and guidance from a growing body of research.⁶⁷ Several ethnographers argued forcefully that effective contemporary ethnography must not limit itself to direct face-to-face interactions or internet research domains exclusively, but must deliberately blend the two.⁶⁸ Their core claim is that when research subjects actively engage with web-based materials—their consumption and production—the data generated cannot be ignored. Garcia, the boldest of the group, asserts that; “ ‘virtually all’ ethnographies of contemporary society should include technologically mediated communication, behavior, or artifacts.”⁶⁹ While the boundaries and

⁶⁵ Personal Interview, East Jerusalem, February 8, 2014.

⁶⁶ al-Msjed al-Aqsa, "al-Quds: al-Msjed Al-Aqsa," YouTube, May 15, 2011, <https://www.youtube.com/user/almsjd>.

⁶⁷ Dale F. Eickelman and Jon W. Anderson, *New Media in the Muslim World: The Emerging Public Sphere* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2003); Faye D. Ginsburg, Lila Abu-Lughod, and Brian Larkin, *Media Worlds: Anthropology on New Terrain* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002).

⁶⁸ E. Gabriella Coleman, "Ethnographic Approaches to Digital Media," *Annual Review of Anthropology* 39, no. 1 (2010); R. E. Hallett and K. Barber, "Ethnographic Research in a Cyber Era," *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography* 43, no. 3 (2013); Christine Hine, *Ethnography of the Internet: Embedded, Embodied and Everyday* (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2015).

⁶⁹ Angela Cora Garcia et al., "Ethnographic Approaches to the Internet and Computer-Mediated Communication," *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography* 38(2009): 57.

frames of this method remain debated,⁷⁰ I have argued at length for the benefits of incorporating social media in ethnographic research in conflict zones in a forthcoming book chapter.⁷¹

My engagement with these resources had specific advantages and limitations. First—and most significantly—social media materials allowed me to triangulate insights and observations made while using my other research methods. Triangulation, according to Norman Denzin, is the “combination of methodologies in the study of the same phenomenon.”⁷² One of its primary purposes is to strengthen the reliability of research findings. Social media materials have done just that in my study. Second, social media improved the effectiveness of my participant observation. The material allowed me to acquaint myself the activities of specific organizations or gatherings of people before I participated in person. As a result, I entered many situations with a clear sense of the types of people I might encounter and the activities they would likely be doing before I went. Additionally, following friends on Facebook allowed me to observe the kinds of information and activities they thought worth posting. Twitter allowed me to track specific political developments as they unfolded. Third, social media allowed me to side-step some of the contextual limitations of research in conflict zones, enabling me to be virtually present when being physically present was impossible. Regarding the Youtube videos from al-Aqsa Mosque mentioned above, I was able to acquaint myself with the teaching of specific religious leaders which I found helpful while speaking with others about their attitudes and opinions of these religious leaders. The videos also gave me a crude impression of the popularity of particular teachers by tracking the view-counts and the number of other people visible on-screen. These videos also facilitated my

⁷⁰ Tom Boellstorff et al., *Ethnography and Virtual Worlds: A Handbook of Method* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012); Christine Hine, *Virtual Methods: Issues in Social Research on the Internet* (London: Bloomsbury Academic 2005).

⁷¹ Schmitt, "Youtube and Ethnography in the Middle East: Creative Access to Al-Aqsa Mosque."

⁷² Norman K. Denzin, *The Research Act: A Theoretical Introduction to Sociological Methods* (New York: McGraw-Hill Inc., 1978), 297.

conversations with the teachers themselves when I spoke with them directly.

Data gathered from social media also presented several complications. Although my identity as a researcher had less influence on the production of videos and posts, I still viewed the material through my own interpretive lenses and worldview. My influence was indirect, not eliminated (more on the influence of my positionality in the next section). Additionally, the people producing the content went through a process of self-filtering and impression management in deciding what material to post. They decided what events were worth recording and which were not. I viewed this dynamic both positively and negatively. Negatively, I only saw what they wanted me to see, and from an ethnographic perspective, what people say after a video recorder is turned off is equally relevant. Positively, I saw exactly what they wanted me to see. How someone curates their life for public consumption on Social Media is essential for understanding the perceptions they aim to cultivate. While using social media as the primary data source in this study was not my intention, including the material enhanced the work significantly.

Beyond Social Media, I consulted other web-based resources—organizational websites, online journals, and Youtube channels. I reviewed sites such as the *dar al-Ifta' al-Filistiniyya* (The Palestinian Office of Religious Rulings) which contains *fatawa* (religious rulings) on Jerusalem, archives of Friday sermons from the al-Aqsa Mosque, a quarterly Islamic journal, and information about Islamic holy sites in Jerusalem. I consulted online journals such as *al-Istiqama* (the Straightfulness), *majallat rasa'il ahl al-Sunna* (the Magazine for Messages of Sunnis) and *hoda al-Islam* (The guidance of Islam) for information on what religious ideas were being promoted. Occasionally, I reviewed printed copies of these journals, as well.

I consulted other non-web-based sources—newspapers, television channels and programs. I reviewed the *al-Quds* and *Al-Ayyam* newspapers (both in print and online) and regularly referenced the online news sites www.maannews.net, www.panet.co.il, and

www.haaretz.com, to gain perspective on current events in Israel-Palestine. For information and analysis on Jerusalem specifically, I consulted www.honaalquds.net and www.alquds-online.org. I watched the channel *Filistyn* (Palestine), and al-Jazeera's documentary series *Filistyn taht al-mijhar* (Palestine Under the Microscope). While the list is not exhaustive, it provides a general sense of the supplemental material I consulted. I have footnoted specific articles, websites, and resources used throughout the study.

Thus far, I have accounted for the ethnographic methods used for data collection. I used participant observation, ethnographic interviews, friendships, social media and other resources. Each method generated valuable ethnographic data and contributed to the overall objectives of the study which ranged from broad understandings of Jerusalem as a city to the specific influence of the conflict of Muslim religious practices. I now turn to an analysis of the effect of my identity on data collection and the knowledge production process.

Personal Identity: Perceiving and Being Perceived

In this section, I analyze my personal and positional influence on the outcomes of the research. I center analysis around two, interconnected influences: the way I perceived interviewees and how they perceived me. Various aspects of my identity—nationality, faith commitments, gender, family dynamics, and other work—had a significant influence. Before exploring each dynamic in detail, I offer a brief (though necessary) commentary on the broader effect of my background as a Westerner, my efforts to mitigate that influence, and the ongoing inability to completely remove myself from these influences.

Ethnographers have long wrestled with the implications of their identity in the knowledge construction process.⁷³ I, too, recognize my inherited analytical lenses and interpretive methods forged in the

⁷³ Edward W. Said, "Representing the Colonized: Anthropology's Interlocutors," *Critical Inquiry* 15, no. 2 (1989); Lila Abu-Lughod, *Veiled Sentiments: Honor and Poetry in a Bedouin Society* (Oakland, CA: University of California Press, 2000); "Zones of Theory in the Anthropology of the Arab World," *Annual Review of Anthropology* 18(1989); Carolyn Nordstrom and Antonius C. G. M. Robben, *Fieldwork under Fire: Contemporary Studies of Violence and Survival* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995).

Western Tradition—a tradition replete with imperialism and colonialism. The classic text elucidating the epistemological underpinnings is Edward Said's *Orientalism*.⁷⁴ According to Said, orientalism wasn't simply a system of subjugation through military conquest, but an epistemological discourse distributing "geopolitical awareness into aesthetic, scholarly, economic, sociological, historical and philosophical texts," which reinforced the ideas of an inferior 'Other.'⁷⁵ Through this discourse, the West justified its colonialization and subjugation of the East. Said's work revealed that the production of knowledge was linked to the use of power, and the West had used its power to subjugate the 'other.' I was raised in an environment that unquestioningly made similar assumptions about 'others.'

To mitigate the influence of my Western tradition, I deliberately sought to identify with my Palestinian interlocutors personally. Erving Goffman argued that field research was a process of, "subjecting yourself, your own body and your own personality, and your own social situation, to the set of contingencies that play upon a set of individuals, so that you can physically and ecologically penetrate their circle of response to their social situation."⁷⁶ With this aim in mind, I immersed myself in the daily lives of Palestinian Jerusalemites for five years. I experienced movement restrictions,⁷⁷ institutional closings,⁷⁸ personal

⁷⁴ Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1979).

⁷⁵ *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1979), 12.

⁷⁶ Erving Goffman, "On Fieldwork," *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography* 18(1989): 125.

⁷⁷ I had meetings set up on the other side of the separation barrier multiple times and would get stuck in traffic at checkpoints. Hours were wasted with no result or value added to my research. On other occasions, the person I was set to interview was restricted. Meetings were always easy to schedule but challenging to keep.

⁷⁸ I experienced difficulties because libraries, organizations, and other institutions would be closed without forewarning. I would show up to the desired place only to find the door locked and no one around. One particular time I recall making a visit to the al-Khalidi library in the Old City of Jerusalem. When I found the door locked, I asked the merchant next door when it would be opened. He said the library had been closed for several months because of the conflict in Gaza.

vulnerabilities,⁷⁹ and the ongoing frustration of life under occupation alongside them. While I knew that my experiences would always be somewhat different (if only because I could leave voluntarily), I developed deep empathy. I came to resonate deeply with Ted Swedenburg's words: "...aware of the injustices suffered by the Palestinians, I have felt frustrated by the degree to which hegemonic institutions impinge upon our ability to speak openly about these issues."⁸⁰ While I have seen the injustices done against Palestinians and have developed the capacity to think critically about my western upbringing; hegemonic institutions, nevertheless, continue to influence me. By acknowledging their power, I hope to mitigate their influence.

***"You [Americans] Talk about your Foreign Policy— We
[Palestinians] Live it."*⁸¹**

These were Omar's words, a middle-aged Palestinian from al-Ram, East Jerusalem. He articulated the asymmetric power imbalance between our two nations concisely. In myriad ways, America's foreign policy dictates the terms of Palestinian existence. As such, my identity as an American had a significant effect on the research.

In conversations with Palestinians, I was occasionally asked, "Are you CIA?" Sometimes the question was a joke. Other times the joke had serious undertones. I often used this question (and others like it) as an invitation for dialogue. As interlocutors understood my disdain for American military interventionism and disgust for America's "dishonest brokering" in the Israel-Palestine conflict,⁸² their concerns of my CIA involvement were assuaged. We found common ground through shared

⁷⁹ The personal strain the conflict had on my family and me was substantial. I was regularly hassled by Israeli security about the nature and motives of my work, for living in an Arab neighborhood, or for speaking Arabic. My wife and young son also faced precarious situations that caused anxiety. I recall reading material on the prevalence of Post Traumatic Stress Syndrome (PTSD) among Palestinians and Jerusalemites and identifying personally.

⁸⁰ Ted Swedenburg, "Occupational Hazards: Palestine Ethnography," *Cultural Anthropology* 4, no. 3 (1989): 271.

⁸¹ Interview, al-Ram, Jerusalem, January 29, 2014.

⁸² Nasser Aruri, *Dishonest Broker: The Role of the United States in Palestine and Israel* (Cambridge, MA: South End Press, 2003).

criticism. I also found Palestinian's willingness to differentiate between America's government policies and its people a valuable distinction that smoothed many interactions. Several people, however, were reluctant—or outright refused—to speak with me. I asked one individual for an interview in the Summer of 2014, for example, and his sharp response left an impression: "Why would I talk with you when you're going to give whatever I tell you to the Jews?"⁸³ He dismissed my assurances of anonymity and ethical standards as petty and footling. He wanted nothing to do with me. Fortunately, these experiences were few.

Many people viewed my interactions with them as an opportunity to persuade me of the justice of their cause or the validity of their grievances. Some considered our conversations a forum for their own political advocacy.⁸⁴ I listened openly. Empathetic listening and sincere compassion became powerful tools for establishing trust and transcending various limitations. Nonetheless, my American identity shaped the data I was able to collect. Did my informants think that by speaking with me they could help change American policies on Israel-Palestine and the conflict? Did they emphasize the validity of their nationalistic claims and gloss the shortcomings, missteps, and internal issues of their community because they wanted me to side with their cause? Did they think I was an American spy, really? These questions accompanied me throughout the data collection process. And I must concede that I will never be able to answer them definitively.

Not only did my identity as an American shape the way others saw me—it influenced the way I saw myself. The most significant influence of my identity as an American is the broader cultural milieu and the historical period from which I came. I am referring to American exceptionalism, specifically. American exceptionalism is the idea that America is superior to other nations. Proponents of the concept argue that America was the "first new nation" (a reference to the American

⁸³ I have deliberately excluded a citation as the interviewee wanted nothing to do with the research project.

⁸⁴ Other researchers have observed this, too. For example, see Julie Peteet, *Gender in Crisis: Women and the Palestinian Resistance Movement* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991).

Revolution) and that its unique constellation of values—liberty, republicanism, egalitarianism, democracy, and laissez-faire economics—positioned it to be a nation that can (and should) transform other nations.⁸⁵ Scholars have observed, tracked, and evaluated this phenomenon throughout American history. While I take issue with the validity of American exceptionalism as a matter of principle and reason, various features of it nevertheless influenced me. My perceptions of governance, economics, liberty, personal ethics, and civic duty were formed within the broader American project, and whether or not I think America is exceptional, is somewhat irrelevant. I brought assumptions to my research about the world and how it works that are firmly rooted in my American identity.

Beyond the American cultural milieu, the contemporary historical moment has shaped me; by which I mean America's role in global affairs generally and position on the Israel-Palestine conflict, specifically. In 1941, Henry Luce coined the term "The American Century" in an editorial for *Time* magazine.⁸⁶ He used the notion to cast a vision for America to embrace a leading role in global affairs, encouraging it to take a missionary approach to the spread of its democratic values. After World War II and in subsequent decades, America embraced this role wholeheartedly. The nation exerted massive economic, military, and cultural influence throughout the globe. Examples abound, but ones involving Israel-Palestine are worth particular mention: support of the 1917 Balfour Declaration, Israel's establishment in 1948, the Gulf War of 1990-1991, the Oslo peace accords from 1993, the War on Terror starting in 2001. All of these efforts were framed as serving the best interests of other nations while, at the same time, serving America's interests. America became the self-proclaimed benevolent big brother to the world. As a result, I saw no tension between America's self-interest and its perceived benevolence. I no longer live this fantasy.

⁸⁵ Much has been written on American Exceptionalism. As a starting point, see Seymour Martin Lipset, *American Exceptionalism: A Double-Edged Sword* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1997).

⁸⁶ Henry Luce, "The American Century," *Time*, February 17, 1941.

I was also raised in an environment where having opinions about global issues—particularly ones involving development, human rights, and democracy—was encouraged. I have had many friends take activist stances on various international issues; economic development, clean water, women’s rights, sex trafficking, fair trade, education, and the list goes on. When I moved to Jerusalem in 2011, I was admittedly motivated by a similar impulse. I wanted to make a difference in the world by helping other people solve their problems. While I still have this impulse, I view it much more soberly, with a more measured perception of my capabilities and limitations. A 2016 article in *The Guardian* titled “Western do-gooders need to resist the allure of ‘exotic problems,’” helped articulate my newfound sobriety. After explaining the naiveté of Westerners who think their short-term, slogan-driven efforts to address complex international issues will amount to anything, the author concludes by arguing that they should,

Resist the reductive seduction of other people’s problems and, instead, fall in love with the longer-term prospect of staying home and facing systemic complexity head-on. Or go if you must, but stay long enough, listen hard enough so that “other people” become real people. But, be warned, they may not seem so easy to “save.”⁸⁷

I came to Jerusalem seduced by an exotic problem, but five-years of living in the city showed me that Palestinian Jerusalemites were, indeed, real people. The experience taught me that America was not all that exceptional, that its benevolence was more self-serving than altruistic, and that my impulse to do good in the world was still good, but it needed some moderation. This is how (with a few hints at my own transformation) being American has had a significant effect on this research project, both with reference to how I perceived myself and how others perceived me.

⁸⁷ Courtney E. Martin, "Western Do-Gooders Need to Resist the Allure of 'Exotic Problems'," *The Guardian*, published electronically April 23, 2016, <https://www.theguardian.com/global-development-professionals-network/2016/apr/23/western-do-gooders-need-to-resist-the-allure-of-exotic-problems>.

The Opportunities and Challenges of Faith

A study on religious practices naturally involves faith, both the faith of the researcher and that of research participants. Here, I discuss my background as a Christian, how it influenced the data collection and knowledge construction processes. I then address, in a broad sense, the various opportunities and challenges I faced as a result of being a non-Muslim researching Muslim religious practices. I explore the influence generally and in the particular research environment of Jerusalem. Throughout, I have had guidance from other scholars who have reflected on the links between faith commitments and positionality.⁸⁸

Because my father is Catholic and my mother Southern Baptist, I spent my formative years attending both Mass and Baptist Sunday School. Church and faith were always good things to me. By college, I felt more affinity with nondenominational churches and ‘went into the ministry,’ working with youth. I earned a Master’s degree from Fuller Theological Seminary and reflected purposefully on the life of Christ, Christian vocation, cross-cultural engagement, and mission in the modern world. I now understand that I grew up in Christian environments with tacit commitments to Christian Zionism—that support for Israel was justified biblically but rarely discussed publicly.⁸⁹ While I hesitate to pigeonhole my religious convictions to one denominational position or tradition today, I have developed strong Anabaptist

⁸⁸ For example, see Yafiah Katherine Randall, "Entering Jerusalem: Deconstructing Assumptions on Identity as a Researcher and as a Sufi," *The Journal of the British Association for the Study of Religions* 17, no. 1 (2015); Robert A. Orsi, *Between Heaven and Earth: The Religious Worlds People Make and the Scholars Who Study Them* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005); Sara Roy, *Hamas and Civil Society in Gaza: Engaging the Islamist Social Sector* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2011), xvi.

⁸⁹ The qualification I have made is important, distinguishing the Christian Zionism I had been exposed to from the more vocal and dogmatic Evangelical supporters of Israel.

tendencies.⁹⁰ I view myself as a biblically oriented, peace-advocating, non-Zionist follower of Jesus.

I understand that this particular view of Christianity has been nurtured in an environment with specific historical genealogies, theological tendencies, and religious practices.⁹¹ I am aware, for example, that Western Christianity, through its mission efforts, has been a complicit actor in the broader project of western colonialism.⁹² I am aware that Christians in America have had a long history of engagement with Muslims and have created knowledge about Muslims which does not necessarily reflect Islam or what it means to be Muslim accurately.⁹³

My specialized knowledge of American Evangelicalism made me particularly sensitive to the various ways my faith could and would be perceived by interviewees. When my faith convictions did not enter the conversation, I viewed them as inconsequential: they had no explicit bearing on how people perceived me.⁹⁴ If my Christian faith came up, I would share that I considered myself a believer. When my interlocutors also considered themselves believers, topics such as God, prophets, scripture, afterlife, and faith came naturally—shared commitment to a religious creed was a natural connecting point. On several occasions, interviewees commented that my sincerity and submission to God bolstered their confidence in my work because they shared similar,

⁹⁰ Their core convictions are compelling; namely, contentious objection to war, peace-making, and viewing the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5-7) as the ethical foundation for the Christian life. I see Jesus' model prayer in Matthew 6:10, "...your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven," as an invitation to work toward peace, justice, and reconciliation in the world today. For more information, see Palmer Becker, "What Is an Anabaptist Christian?," *MissioDei*, no. 18 (2008).

⁹¹ T.M. Luhrmann, *When God Talks Back: Understanding the American Evangelical Relationship with God* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2012); Frances FitzGerald, *The Evangelicals: The Struggle to Shape America* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2017).

⁹² Beth Baron, *The Orphan Scandal: Christian Missionaries and the Rise of the Muslim Brotherhood* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2014).

⁹³ Thomas Kidd, *American Christians and Islam: Evangelical Culture and Muslims from the Colonial Period to the Age of Terrorism* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2009).

⁹⁴ I acknowledge that interviewees were inevitably making assessments me whether they shared them vocally or not. I cannot, therefore, say with certainty whether my faith did—or did not—play an implicit role in shaping others perception of me.

fundamental convictions. I found personal faith particularly useful in these situations.⁹⁵

Occasionally, however, my faith complicated interactions. Some misinterpreted my intrigue in their religion as a sign that I might be a potential convert. They would sincerely—sometimes insistently—reorient interactions toward inviting me to become a Muslim. I found these discussions somewhat distracting but chose, primarily, to understand them as sincere expressions of their faith.⁹⁶ Occasionally, I would remind interlocutors that, “There is no compulsion in religion” or that Muslims should, “Let the People of the Gospel judge by that which Allah hath revealed therein.”⁹⁷ Quoting these Qur’anic verses often sparked interesting dialogues about the true meanings of faith, how to understand and interpret scripture, and the like. They helped steer conversations away from an overemphasis on conversion and back to other, more productive lines of discussion. Some interviewees suspected my eagerness to discuss religious matters belied an ulterior motive of converting them to Christianity—I assured them that that was not my intention.⁹⁸

Since I was a non-Muslim studying Muslim religious practices in Jerusalem, I faced several unique opportunities and challenges. On some occasions, being non-Muslim limited my access to Muslim religious practices: people questioned my presence or participation, struggling to discern my motives. This was a challenge. These

⁹⁵ I question whether or not agnostic or atheist researchers would have been able to establish such trust. For a fascinating study on the methodological limitations of unbelief, see Mark Dressman, “Beyond Disbelief: A Confession of Religion, Technology and Academic Conceit,” *Ethnography* 14, no. 2 (2012).

⁹⁶ On the specific issue of responding to people proselytization efforts, see *Ibid.*

⁹⁷ *The Holy Quran*, trans. Abdullah Yusuf Ali (London: Goodword books, 2003). al-Baqara 2:256 and al-Maeda 5:47, respectively.

⁹⁸ If they pressed me, I would explain my view that Jesus in the Gospels never asked someone to leave their socio-cultural identity to become a *Christian* in order follow him (See John 4). Furthermore, Jesus did not see himself as the founder of the Christian religion as it is broadly understood today. He, instead, operated firmly within the Jewish prophetic tradition and led a renewal movement from within. Only decades later, his followers were called Christians and the movement took on a distinct identity of its own (Acts 11:19-26). Thus, I found no biblical evidence of Jesus asking people to become Christians and would not ask something of them that Jesus did not require of his followers.

interactions rarely generated valuable ethnographic content. At other times, being non-Muslim was an obvious advantage. Some people, I perceived, felt more free to speak about their religious views precisely because I was non-Muslim. They talked about personal frustrations and ambivalences regarding a broad range of issues in their religious tradition with candor. In Ramadan, for example, when social pressure for pious comportment is high, numerous people aired their frustrations with having to pretend they were fasting. Such conversations underscored the social dynamics of religious practices—the tensions between idealized representations of religious traditions and the real-world experience of humans living them. These were productive ethnographic encounters.

Being a non-Muslim working on Muslim religious practices in Jerusalem had one particular disadvantage—my access to al-Aqsa Mosque. I was severely limited. Since Israeli Border Police control entry to the compound, they decide who and under what conditions entry is permitted. Muslims are usually allowed access to the site, while non-Muslims are limited to specific, carefully monitored visiting hours. Thus, even while I was able to access the site with some regularity during visiting hours, my ability to observe religious practices was severely limited. I explain the details and political circumstances of these arrangements in Chapter 7. I have now discussed how two aspects of my identity—being American and Christian—influenced how I perceived others and how they perceived me. I now consider my gender, family dynamics, and role within the community.

Gender and Family Dynamics

Gender and family dynamics played an influential role in the study, determining to a large extent the access I was able to gain and the data I was able to collect. I organize analysis here sequentially regarding my position as a male, husband, and father. As a male, I socialized freely in public and private spaces with other men. On many days, I easily flowed with male social-worlds; drinking coffee, smoking water pipes, running errands, and walking through the Old City. I had

unquestioned access to myriad male social environments. Thus, the majority of my interlocutors in this study were male.

Since Palestinian social-life has more definitive gender-boundaries than my American culture, I was deliberately more conservative in my interactions with women. I wanted to avoid transgressing cultural boundaries that could raise suspicion of sexual impropriety, for example. To navigate the complex terrain, I relied on two sources of information: my male interlocutors and my wife. I regularly observed the way Palestinian men interacted with women. I also asked them questions to aid my understanding what was appropriate and inappropriate. I often asked the same question to more than one person to generate an understanding of what would be the best way for me to approach a particular situation. My Palestinian Arabic teachers (whom I discuss shortly) were a valuable source of input as well.

The second source of information was my wife. While she is not Palestinian herself; she, too, accumulated five-years of experience understanding proper cross-gender comportment in Palestinian society. We regularly discussed her observations, and they contributed to my overall cross-cultural competency. Beyond being a sounding board for appropriately discerning behavior across gender lines, my wife played a significant role in this research project. She was present with me in Jerusalem for all five years (short trips to America and Europe for holidays aside). First, we regularly discussed her experiences in the city, especially ones where we were not together. I was consistently exposed to her experiences, observations, and recollections. While I rarely took notes on her relayed experiences, they gave me valuable insight into the city and the worlds of women specifically. Second, her presence generated many opportunities that I would have never had otherwise. For example, my married friends often invited me to their homes, demanding I bring her so we could introduce our wives. Likewise, my wife's girlfriends introduced me to their husbands. Receiving Palestinian hospitality was an ongoing part of our shared experience as a couple. Finally, when my wife accompanied me

through the city, whether for work or leisurely activities, women felt safe to speak with me, especially after she initiated conversation. I gained access to the *Murabitat*, for example, through her network of girlfriends. This essential part of the ethnography would have been missing without her involvement.

In March 2014, in the middle of my fieldwork, my wife gave birth to our first son. He was born at a Palestinian hospital in Bethlehem. His new presence in our lives changed the dynamics of my fieldwork significantly. On the one hand, he made the work more difficult because my wife and I struggled to adjust. Crying, diapers, and late-night bottles aside, I was no longer able to dash out the door on moment's notice to participate in social and religious activities with Palestinians. In a place where these opportunities come and go quickly, this was a significant loss. On the other hand, my new son generated many exciting opportunities. The first eighteen months of his life were immersed in our Palestinian community, and we experienced real closeness to our Palestinians friends. By sharing this life-changing experience with our Palestinians friends and neighbors, we had a unique window into Palestinian culture few non-Palestinians see. Additionally, my son's presence made developing new contacts with potential interviewees much easier. Even when he wasn't physically present, for example, people responded positively when they learned my son was born in Bethlehem and that we were speaking Arabic to him at home. Anecdotally, I fielded far fewer questions about being CIA after he arrived. My identity and standing in the community changed, and for the better.

Arabic and the Common Word Language Institute

My presence in Jerusalem was also linked to the Common Word Institute. In 2012, I co-founded the language institute with another American doctoral student, dissatisfied with the language-learning options available in Jerusalem and the West Bank. My involvement with the institute was a defining feature of my identity in the community and augmented my research substantially.

The core ethos of the institute was to promote language learning and cultural exchange. As an institute organizer, I regularly interacted with and trained Arabic teachers. Over four years, I worked with approximately 30 Arabic instructors. While several had backgrounds in education and teaching, the majority were inexperienced. I trained them how to teach their language to non-native speakers. These Palestinian teachers were from diverse backgrounds. The institute also connected me with a wide variety of non-Arabic-speaking individuals who, for whatever reason, wanted to learn the language. These connections often gave me access to the Palestinians they knew. This, too, contributed to my use of the ‘Snowball’ technique discussed above.

As a language learner myself, I spent countless one-on-one hours with Arabic teachers. I had—at a minimum—one, three-hour private lesson per week over the course of my five years in Jerusalem. Most weeks I had two or three. Beyond vocabulary acquisition, I used lessons to further probe and understand my experiences in the community. My interactions with language teachers were a constant source of learning and reflection which benefited the research immensely. The value of doing ethnography in the language of the research participants has long been established.⁹⁹ Sustained effort over time allowed me to achieve superior Arabic language skills. As a result, I conducted almost all my research in Arabic. I only used English when others had superior English skills. Some people initiated conversations in English but switched to Arabic once they realized my Arabic was better than their English. Using Arabic allowed people to express themselves naturally. First encounters were often humorous because they were often surprised by my fluency. People told me multiple times that I was one of them—a Palestinian, a Jerusalemite—because of my Arabic skills. Arabic was an exceptional tool for building rapport and trust, adding immensely to my ethnographic research.

Yet since I am not a native speaker, interacting in Arabic occasionally caused minor comprehension issues. I overcame these difficulties by asking clarifying questions. If the problem persisted, I

⁹⁹ For a detailed discussion of the importance of using the indigenous language for ethnographic research see, Spradley, *The Ethnographic Interview*, Chapter 2.

resolved it during transcription (if I made a recording) when I could repeat or slowdown recordings as needed. If transcription did not address the issue, I consulted my language teachers. Their input filled vocabulary gaps and clarified idiomatic expressions. By the last two years of my time in Jerusalem—when I conducted most of my ethnographic interviews—my dependence on language teacher’s assistance was minimal.

In this section, I have observed how my positionality as an American influenced the research project, both regarding how I perceive myself and the way Palestinians perceived me. I have also examined how my Christian faith and the fact of being a non-Muslim researching Muslim religious practices influenced my data collection and knowledge construction processes. I have explored the dynamics of my male gender conducting ethnographic research which included Palestinian women, the ongoing presence of my wife in Jerusalem, and the opportunities and challenges of having a first child while doing fieldwork. While I have considered these influences to the best of my abilities (considering both the implicit and explicit systems of thought they represent) I will never, ultimately, be able to fully account for the ways they have shaped the outcomes of my research.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have accounted for the methods I used in the study. They were ethnographic—participant observation, ethnographic interviews, friendships, social media, and other resources—and I analyzed data by using ‘Grounded Theory.’ Each method generated valuable ethnographic data and contributed to the overall objectives of the study. I developed a broad understanding of Jerusalem as a city as well as gained specific insights on how the conflict influences Muslim religious practices.

My goal in doing an ethnography of Muslim religious practices in Jerusalem was ultimately about developing an accurate understanding of the meanings Muslims attribute to their religious practices in the city.

The project was a formidable task, but Ellen Pader's account of what it takes to create an ethnography inspired me:

A willingness to engage underlying issues and their internal structures of meaning... requires intense respect for differences of opinion and of belief systems as well as a profound ability to listen, to really listen hard to someone else's common sense and logical structure, and to trust the other. It takes an ethnographic sensibility: a feeling, an excitement, and a deep appreciation, maybe even a bit of awe, that human groups create the intricate, rich, and dynamic structures of living.¹⁰⁰

I hope such a comment could be made of me and that that the empathetic understanding I developed for Muslims in Jerusalem would translate to readers—that they, too, would appreciate the intricate, vibrant, and dynamic people who call themselves Palestinian Muslim Jerusalemites.

¹⁰⁰ Ellen Pader, "Seeing with an Ethnographic Sensibility: Explorations beneath the Surface of Public Policies," in *Interpretation and Method: Empirical Research Methods and the Interpretive Turn*, ed. Dvora Yanow and Peregrine Schwartz-Shea (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, Inc, 2006), 172.

Chapter 3

Theory and Literature

Conceptual Reinvigoration and Piety

In Chapter 1, I argued that rituals have symbolic meaning and enable people to forge links between their bodies and the discourses that shape their lives. I also observed that a peculiar dynamic arises when they are disrupted. They are adapted physically and discursively, and people improvise their performance. In their 2011 article, "The Ethnographic Arriving of Palestine," Furani and Rabinowitz skillfully outline the major ethnographic developments regarding Palestine and Palestinians. Two of their points are particularly relevant to the present study. First, the authors argue that "Palestine could become a site for conceptual reinvigoration that may influence wider ethnographic debates."¹⁰¹ Second, they point out that piety has been neglected within Palestinian ethnographies, placing the mention in a short list of topics they call "prosaic" but still "politically crucial issues."¹⁰² In this chapter, I demonstrate how my thesis aims to stir 'conceptual reinvigoration' and addresses the area of neglect. I take each task in turn.

Theoretical Tools and Innovations

In this section, I begin by looking at fundamental theoretical insights of the Anthropology of Islam, discussing their relevance for the study. I then move to a discussion of rituals, showing that anthropologists have been attuned to their ability to create meaning since the 1970s. While the insight was well established early in the field's development, scholars began to dismiss and neglect it. Attention was given, instead, to theoretical approaches that emphasized rational and cognitive dimensions of the human experience. Recently, however, the trend has shifted, and scholars have begun to reinvigorate

¹⁰¹ Furani and Rabinowitz, "The Ethnographic Arriving of Palestine," 484-85.

¹⁰² "The Ethnographic Arriving of Palestine," 484.

discussion about rituals. But those insights have never been applied to the Palestinian case. I then explain how rituals are the building blocks of tradition and that Islam is best understood as a ‘discursive tradition.’ I highlight that cultures in transition—be they threatened or weakened—are more likely to invent traditions as people grapple to make meaning in their lives during difficult circumstances. I conclude the section by discussing my theoretical innovation—that disruptions create affordances for improvisations, and that this observation and the resultant insights carry the potential to spark ‘conceptual reinvigoration.’

The Anthropology of Islam as Theoretical Foundation

Clifford Geertz’s study, *Islam Observed*, was the seminal text that brought the study of Islam into the sites of Anthropologists.¹⁰³ He moved the anthropological community away from its traditional focus on kinship and rural village life and placed it on religion and began tracking variance in local expression by contrasting Morocco and Indonesia—two Muslim communities as geographically disparate as possible. While Geertz’s contemporaries criticized the work for assuming a single form of religious experience, for not giving adequate voice to his interlocutors, and for neglecting to give a methodological account of his research; the work was path-breaking in its approach to Islam.¹⁰⁴ *Islam Observed* is an appropriate starting point for the present study because Geertz’s insight about the diversity of religious expression is an underlying theme throughout my work.

Geertz, however, made no effort to define the Anthropology of Islam as a separate sub-discipline within the field of Anthropology. That initiative came several years later with the publication of two review articles. The first, by Fernea and Malarkey, argued for expanding the boundaries of the Anthropology of Islam as an academic and theoretical

¹⁰³ Clifford Geertz, *Islam Observed: Religious Development in Morocco and Indonesia* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1968).

¹⁰⁴ For a detailed critique of Geertz’ work, see Daniel Martin Varisco, *Islam Obscured: The Rhetoric of Anthropological Representation* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005).

discipline of its own.¹⁰⁵ The second, by Abdul Hamid el-Zein, offered the first synthetic definition of the field.¹⁰⁶ Both articles moved the academic discussion about Islam as a fixed monolithic and theological construct to a more nuanced and culturally sensitive treatment. They emphasized relational and localized understandings of Islam. My study maintains that original impulse.

The next work with direct relevance is Michael Gilsenan's *Recognizing Islam: An Anthropologist's Introduction*.¹⁰⁷ The distinctive element of Gilsenan's work was methodological. He chose to focus on the everyday religious practices of Muslims and the discourses of authority surrounding them. The robust methodology positioned him to reflect critically on western approaches to these societies. In his own words:

[I] did not consider Islam to be a monolithic 'it', an entity which could be treated as a theological or civilizational historical bloc, unchanging and essentially 'other' in some primordial way. Nor did I wish to put forward an account of belief, doctrine and history as systematized by Orientalists, theologians or jurists... I was and am concerned with more sociological questions of social and cultural variation in very different societies subjected to the conflict of the colonial and post-colonial periods and of the very turbulent processes we label modernity.¹⁰⁸

Gilsenan's work is constructive for my project on two levels: first, it affirms the core impulse of the anthropology of Islam—offering nuanced analysis with an emphasis on local variation; second—and more importantly—it highlights the epistemological implications of producing knowledge about Muslims in the colonial and post-colonial periods. While the dynamics of the colonial and post-colonial periods have changed significantly, colonialism remains a determinative force in Jerusalem, influencing the lives of Muslims to the present day.

¹⁰⁵ Robert A. Fernea and James M. Malarkey, "Anthropology of the Middle East and North Africa: A Critical Assessment," *Annual Review of Anthropology* 4(1975).

¹⁰⁶ Abdul Hamid el-Zein, "Beyond Ideology and Theology: The Search for the Anthropology of Islam," *ibid.*6(1977).

¹⁰⁷ Michael Gilsenan, *Recognizing Islam: An Anthropologist's Introduction* (London: Croom Helm, 1982).

¹⁰⁸ *Recognizing Islam: An Anthropologist's Introduction* (London: Croom Helm, 1982), 5.

Additionally, Gilsenan became widely regarded as one of the key figures in the development of the Anthropology of Islam because he deconstructed the illusion of a unified Orientalist, ethnocentric view of Islam. In other words, a clear distinction between the Anthropology of Islam and Orientalism emerged with Gilsenan.

I have, thus far, demonstrated that the Anthropology of Islam—with its emphasis on the diversity of expressions, everyday religious practices, and epistemological critique of the colonial context—provides a firm conceptual and theoretical foundation for the present study. I now turn to theoretical insights about rituals and their capacity to create meaning.

Five years after *Islam observed*, Clifford Geertz published *The Interpretation of Cultures*. In it, he explained his view of religious rituals and the role they play in create meaning. I quote here at length:

For it is in ritual—that is, consecrated behavior—that this conviction that religious conceptions are veridical and that religious directives are sound is somehow generated. It is in some sort of ceremonial form—even if that form be hardly more than the recitation of a myth, the consultation of an oracle, or the decoration of a grave—that the moods and motivations which sacred symbols induce in men and the general conceptions of the order of existence which they formulate for men meet and reinforce one another. In a ritual, the world as lived and the world as imagined, fused under the agency of a single set of symbolic forms, turn out to be the same world, producing thus that idiosyncratic transformation in one's sense of reality... Whatever role divine intervention may or may not play in the creation of faith—and it is not the business of the scientist to pronounce upon such matters one way or the other—it is, primarily at least, out of the context of concrete acts of religious observance that religious conviction emerges on the human plane.¹⁰⁹

While Geertz makes several relevant points to the current study, two merit specific attention. First, Geertz argues that rituals create a synthesis or harmony between the lived world and how it is imagined, fusing the two together in a single set of symbolic forms. In other words, the symbolic dimension of rituals informs how people perceive realities. Second, Geertz demonstrates that religious convictions are formed through the medium of 'concrete acts of religious observances.' Bodily practices work together through the medium of symbolic forms to

¹⁰⁹ Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures*, 112-13.

establish cohesive perceptions of reality in the lives of the believer.

Rituals and beliefs are thus linked.

While Geertz made these observations in the 1970s, the bulk of scholarly attention moved in another direction—toward the cognitive and rational. The theoretical focus is linked to the intellectual and rationalist emphases dominant since the Enlightenment. Mellor and Shilling explain, “The prioritization of economics and culture over religious factors has been taken even further by those social constructionist theoreticians who efface religion by seeing it as ‘analytically irrelevant’ or simply a ‘mystifying’ ideological means of obscuring more important developments.”¹¹⁰ In other words, not only have religious rituals been neglected, they have been deemed irrelevant by a rationalist school of thought, dismissive of religion altogether. The authors continue:

Under the influence of writers such as Michel Foucault and Edward Said, religion is represented in this constructionist position as a form of popular and academic false consciousness; a consciousness that can be rehabilitated only when it subordinates religion to political factors by understanding it as an ideological and implicitly imperialist construct.¹¹¹

The gravity of Mellor and Shilling’s claim is worth emphasizing: the field of theoretical inquiry involving religion and religious practices has been deemed little more than an issue of false consciousness, a vestige of imperial legacies. Scholars unraveled a foundational insight—that rituals link people to the meaning structures that define their lives. As I see it, studies animated by the constructionist position leave readers with a stilted and unproductive treatment of religion. Astute readers will also recognize that Foucault and Said are dominant theoreticians within the field of Palestine studies. While their contributions in other areas have been great, their views on religion and rituals are weak at best. Hence, Furani and Rabinowitz’ comment at the outset of the chapter is apropos—that Palestine could become a site for ‘conceptual reinvigoration.’ A theoretical approach that foregrounds the power of rituals in shaping people’s lives is much needed.

¹¹⁰ Philip A. Mellor and Chris Shilling, “Body Pedagogics and the Religious Habitus: A New Direction for the Sociological Study of Religion,” *Religion* 40, no. 1 (2010): 1.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*

While some studies have focused on religious rituals and critiqued the rationalist oversight in other fields, none have been conducted in Palestine.¹¹² I have chosen to discuss Saba Mahmood's work as a fitting example. Mahmood's ethnography, *Politics of Piety: The Islamic Revival and the Feminist Subject*, uses the women's piety movement in Egypt in the 1990s as a way of thinking through the quandary: "Why would such a large number of women across the Muslim world actively support a movement that seems inimical to their 'own interests and agendas,' especially at a historical moment when these women appear to have more emancipatory possibilities available to them?"¹¹³ The question reveals the incapacity of feminist, liberal, and secular discourses to explain why these women would willingly submit themselves to the patriarchal structures which are perceived to operate at cross-purposes to their empowerment or emancipation. Mahmood, to solve the quandary, shows how the women engage in religious practices (such as prayer and wearing the hijab) to cultivate virtues like humility and modesty. The rituals operate as a form of empowerment in their own right. Mahmood explains, "For the mosque participants, it is the various movements of the body that comprise the material substance of the ethical domain."¹¹⁴ Thus, moral self-fashioning is accomplished through specific activities and is the product of practices and procedures on the-self which, in this case, are religious rituals. This is the link to the present study. Mahmood's weakness, however, is that she has fallen into a common trap for anthropologists of Islam—she has prioritized analysis of highly-pious Muslims and isolated religious experiences from

¹¹² For example, see Charles Hirschkind, *The Ethical Soundscape: Cassette Sermons and Islamic Counterpublics* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006); Talal Asad, *Genealogies of Religion: Discipline and Reasons of Power in Islam and Christianity* (Baltimore, MD: John Hopkins Press, 1993); Meredith McGuire, *Lived Religion: Faith and Practice in Everyday Life* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008); Philip A. Mellor and Chris Shilling, *Re-Forming the Body: Religion, Community and Modernity* (London: Sage, 1997).

¹¹³ Saba Mahmood, *Politics of Piety: The Islamic Revival and the Feminist Subject* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005), 2.

¹¹⁴ *Politics of Piety: The Islamic Revival and the Feminist Subject* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005), 31.

other aspects of life.¹¹⁵ Her work, for example, does little to theorize how religious practices might shape the lives of moderately pious or non-pious women. Weakness aside, Mahmoud's work is still productive for this study. She explains how Muslim religious rituals create meaning in people lives, forging links between their bodies and the discourses they are embedded within.

Next, Samuli Schielke's work gave me clarity on Mahmoud's weakness by offering a valuable corrective. Schielke provocatively claims that "there is too much Islam in the anthropology of Islam."¹¹⁶ He argues that anthropologists have unintentionally prioritized the practices and discourses of scholars, activities, and religious leaders: "Such anthropology is too likely to be trapped in the pitfalls of exceptionalism, too preoccupied with Islam to make really good sense of what it may mean to be a Muslim."¹¹⁷ Schielke aims his critique at scholars like Saba Mahmoud and Talal Asad (whom I discuss shortly). He offers the concept of 'grand schemes' as a corrective, clarifying the relationship between beliefs and behaviors on a broad scale:

I think that to understand the significance of a religion or any other faith in people's lives, it is perhaps more helpful to look at it less specifically as a religion or a tradition and instead take a more fuzzy and open-ended view of it as a grand scheme that is actively imagined and debated by people and that can offer various kinds of direction, meaning and guidance in people's lives.¹¹⁸

Schielke's notion, thus, gives adequate space for the complexities and ambivalences that typify daily-life and acts of piety—and not just those who are 'religious' or 'devout.' In other words, one need not be sincerely or consistently 'pious' to draw from the symbolic power of religious rituals when the need may arise. The meanings people attribute to rituals come from fuzzy and open-ended themes. I call this the repertoire of themes (See Chapter 4).

¹¹⁵ Deeb and Winegar, "Anthropologies of Arab-Majority Societies," 544-45.

¹¹⁶ Samuli Schielke, "Second Thoughts About the Anthropology of Islam, or How to Make Sense of Grand Schemes in Everyday Life," *Working Papers* 2(2010): 2.

¹¹⁷ "Second Thoughts About the Anthropology of Islam, or How to Make Sense of Grand Schemes in Everyday Life," *Working Papers* 2(2010): 14.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*

Thus far, I have demonstrated how scholars within the field of the Anthropology of Islam have provided useful analytical tools to frame and interpret my findings. Thanks to this field, Islam would no longer be a monolith, attention would be given to colonial legacies, and the link between rituals and the creation of meaning would be explored. I also pointed out that while the link between rituals and beliefs had been in place since the 1970s, the insight has been neglected on account of other theoretical approaches that emphasized rational and cognitive dimensions of the human experience. Scholars became suspect and dismissive of religion. Finally, I showed how scholars have begun to address the oversight (such as Mahmoud and Schielke), but no study had, as of yet, been done like this in Palestine. I now broaden my analytical scope to explain how rituals are the building-blocks of tradition.

The Invention of Tradition

Rituals are the building blocks of tradition. Their temporal structuring (discussed in Chapter 1) reveals how the process takes place. Rituals link people to the past and the future by defining reality in the present. They provide a sense of order and permanence in a world that is otherwise ephemeral and indeterminate. As people perform them over time, rituals become traditions. And traditions—phenomenologically—are invented. While on first impression, the claim that all traditions are invented may seem outlandish, a more thorough consideration reveals that the notion is helpful. Hobsbawm and Ranger developed the notion in their book, *The Invention of Tradition*. The work, while focusing primarily on state-rituals, has become a widely cited study for understanding the evolution of traditions more broadly.¹¹⁹ They define the concept:

¹¹⁹ For relevant applications of the ‘intention of tradition’ thesis, see: Nur Masalha, *The Bible and Zionism: Invented Traditions, Archaeology and Post-Colonialism in Israel-Palestine* (London: Zed Books, 2007); Baudouin Dupret et al., *Ethnographies of Islam: Ritual Performances and Everyday Practices* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2012); Jens Kreinath, Constance Hartung, and Annette Deschner, *The Dynamics of Changing Rituals: The Transformation of Religious Rituals within Their Social and Cultural Context* (New York: Peter Lang, 2004).

Invented tradition is taken to mean a set of practices, normally governed by overtly or tacitly accepted rules and of a ritual or symbolic nature, which seek to inculcate certain values and norms of behavior by repetition, which automatically implies continuity with the past.¹²⁰

Thus, ritual activity is a generative tool for the creation of tradition which, by definition, orders the past. Traditions provide the link between discourses and practices. Since I am primarily concerned with religious rituals, I focus there specifically. All religious traditions, in a broad sense, could be viewed as inventions. The idea is similar to Emile Durkheim's that religion is basically society worshiping itself, and, therefore, a mere social invention.¹²¹ While these reflections could be jarring to a person of self-professed 'faith,' it is worth noting that Hobsbawm and Durkheim are not making claims about the merits or veracity of traditions, as it were; they are observing how traditions operate phenomenologically.

Here, Talal Asad's definition of Islam becomes useful. He outlined his case in an article entitled, "*The Idea of an Anthropology of Islam.*"

If one wants to write an anthropology of Islam one should begin, as Muslims do, from the concept of a discursive tradition that includes and relates itself to the founding texts of the Qur'an and the Hadith. Islam is neither a distinctive social structure nor a heterogeneous collection of beliefs, artifacts, customs, and morals. It is a tradition.¹²²

Asad defines Islam as a 'discursive tradition.' He aims to show how anthropologist can understand what Muslims consider to be Islam by analyzing the ongoing discourses within their communities as they manifest in conflict and internal argument. He claims, "It [analyzing discourses and authority] should be the anthropologist's first task."¹²³

¹²⁰ Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger, *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 1.

¹²¹ Emile Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life* (New York, NY: The Free Press, [1912] 1995).

¹²² *The Idea of an Anthropology of Islam* (Washington DC: Centre for Contemporary Arab Studies), 14.

¹²³ *The Idea of an Anthropology of Islam* (Washington DC: Centre for Contemporary Arab Studies), 16.

While my critique of his work comes later, Asad's notion of a 'discursive tradition' implicitly links the religion of Islam to the 'invention of tradition.'

Two scholars, Dale Eickelman and James Piscatori, take the discussion a step further and explicitly link the 'invention of tradition' thesis to Islam. They illustrate, in *Muslim Politics*, how political traditions in Islam are Muslims inventions. I quote here at length:

Muslims and non-Muslims alike tend to take at face value the ideological claim by some Muslims that the key elements of Islamic tradition are fixed... All traditions are created, however, through shared practice, and they can be profoundly and consciously modified and manipulated under the guise of a return to a more legitimate earlier practice. Of even more significance, changed economic and political conditions can profoundly alter the meaning and significance of ideas, movements, social and personal identities, and institutional arrangements, without the proponents of these ideas being fully aware of the nature of the change... Politics, as we have shown, is intimately connected with the process of symbolic production. But, because symbols are general and ambiguous rather than specific, they simultaneously provide a link with the past and room for change (Scarritt 1972:29)... Since values take on symbolic form, the parameters of the culture appear to remain intact while the renewal and transformation of values are in fact taking place. Thus, the constancy of traditions and shared myths is affirmed, even while changes of belief and value are underway and traditions are reinvented (Barthes 1957:41-46; Samuel and Thompson 1990:14).¹²⁴

Eickelman and Piscatori make several important points. Muslims tend to view Islam as a 'fixed' tradition, but such fixity belies the tradition's transformative capacity. Muslim practices evolve as economic and political conditions change. And Muslims themselves often overlook the shifts since rituals and traditions, by definition, create a perceived continuity with the past. Hobsbawm and Ranger, from above, pointed out that invented traditions are, "responses to novel situations which take the form of reference to old situations, or which establish their own past by quasi-obligatory repetition."¹²⁵

Rituals and traditions also shape people's perception of history. That is, if history is the way communities come to understand themselves through the creation of meaningful narratives by referencing

¹²⁴ Dale F. Eickelman and James P. Piscatori, *Muslim Politics* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996), 28-29.

¹²⁵ Hobsbawm and Ranger, *The Invention of Tradition*, 1-2.

their past, history is not so much about what ‘literally’ happened, but how events are remembered—the discourses that get built around past events. Back to Eickelman and Piscatori who captured this point well:

...The line between occurred and perceived pasts depends upon the construction, dissemination, and acceptance of authoritative historical narratives, the past of occurred events exists mostly as a pool of resources which can be drawn upon in traditional and modern settings to sanction present practice. In effect, the line between occurred and perceived events is inherently blurred because the process of creating tradition is both conscious and explicit, and unconscious and implicit.¹²⁶

The past, in other words, is a pool of resources people draw from to understand and interpret present realities and sanction current practices. When I discuss Jerusalemites’ repertoire of themes in Chapter 4, I am primarily using this understanding of history and memory. Eickelman and Piscatori are not alone in understanding history this way.¹²⁷ Jacob Lassner and Ilan Troen, for example, have argued from a similar vantage point in their 2007 work, *Jews and Muslims in the Arab World: Haunted by Pasts Real and Imagined*.¹²⁸ The book is not concerned about the ‘facts’ of history, but how Arab and Jewish communities appeal to the idea of history to make sense of their present realities.

Finally, Hobsbawm and Ranger point out (and Eickelman and Piscatori echo) that the invention of tradition occurs more in vulnerable or threatened societies, ones undergoing rapid change:

...We should expect it [inventing tradition] to occur more frequently when a rapid transformation of society weakens or destroys the social patterns for which ‘old’ traditions had been designed, producing new ones to which they were not applicable, or when such old traditions and their institutional carriers and promulgators no longer prove sufficiently adaptable and flexible, or are otherwise eliminated.¹²⁹

¹²⁶ Eickelman and Piscatori, *Muslim Politics*, 29.

¹²⁷ For example, see Eviatar Zerubavel, *Time Maps: Collective Memory and the Social Shape of the Past* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2004).

¹²⁸ Lassner and Troen, *Jews and Muslims in the Arab World: Haunted by Pasts Real and Imagined*, (Lanham, MD: Roman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2007).

¹²⁹ Hobsbawm and Ranger, *The Invention of Tradition*, 4-5; Eickelman and Piscatori, *Muslim Politics*, 29-30.

Jerusalem, as a city, has undergone massive transformation since Israel's occupation in 1967. These disruptions and changes are on display throughout the study. The critical point here is that we should expect rituals to evolve in disrupted contexts. People are looking for stability and orientation when society is undergoing rapid change. And Rituals, because they are repetitive and temporally structuring (Chapter 1), help individuals and communities to cope with change. People experience them authentically and sincerely because rituals allow people to create meaning. But since the environment is disrupted and volatile, the rituals often change.

In this section, I have shown that rituals are the building blocks of traditions and that, phenomenologically, traditions are invented. Islam operates this way as a 'discursive tradition.' History, too, includes an element of invention because what happened is less important than what is remembered. It is a socially-centered tradition where people refer to their collective past to make sense of their current realities. And cultures in transition—be they threatened or weakened—are more likely to invent traditions as they grapple to make meaning of difficult circumstances.

Disruption, Affordance, and Creativity

Thus far, I have laid the theoretical foundation of the study. Yet the theories I have evaluated have predicated their analysis on an implicit and unquestioned assumption—that people who desire to perform religious rituals have the means to act on their intention in regular and routinized ways. As I noted in Chapter 1, Muslim religious practices in Jerusalem are regularly disrupted, and the mundane dynamic between intention and performance cannot be taken for granted. This particular dynamic opens up Jerusalem to a distinct line of theoretical inquiry. In this section, I discuss the intellectual grounding for my theoretical innovation—that disruptions create an opportunity for ritual improvisations. I discuss affordances, human agency, and creativity. I hope to spark 'conceptual reinvigoration.'

James J. Gibson used the term affordances initially in a 1977 article, titled “The Theory of Affordances.” He further developed the concept in a subsequent book, *The Ecological Approach to Visual Representation*. Since the works were published, the idea has gained traction in various fields of social inquiry, including, among others, perception theory, psychology, ethics, and anthropology. The anthropologist, Webb Keane, used affordances as a central concept in his discussion of ethics. Because his explanation was lucid and constructive, I’ve included it here verbatim:

As defined by psychologist James J. Gibson, “the affordance of anything is a specific combination of the properties of its substance and its surface” in light of what it offers, provides, or furnishes for the animal that perceives it (1977: 67–68). Or as the philosopher George Herbert Mead put it, “The chair invites us to sit down” (1962: 280).¹³⁰

Keane’s account lays out two critical dimensions of affordances: first, that an object must inhabit a given environment, and, second, that someone must perceive it. The object and the person’s perception of it create an affordance. The chair analogy locks in the point and draws the reader into further reflection:

What is crucial here is the fact of (mere) potentiality: a chair may invite you to sit, but it does not determine that you will sit. You may instead use it as a stepladder, a desk, a paperweight, or a lion tamer’s prop or to prop up an artwork, to burn as firewood, to block a door, or to hurl at someone. Or you may not use it at all. Affordances are properties of the chair vis-à-vis a particular human activity. As such they are real and exist in a world of natural causality (chairs can hold down loose papers or catch fire), but they do not induce people to respond to them in any particular way.¹³¹

Potentiality is the critical concept between objects and perceivers. The environments humans inhabit are filled with objects and once they are perceived, humans open themselves to an expansive realm of creative possibilities.

By taking this approach to human action, I align myself with the American school of neo-pragmatism which has seen a revival since the

¹³⁰ Webb Keane, *Ethical Life: Its Natural and Social Histories* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2015), 27-28.

¹³¹ *Ethical Life: Its Natural and Social Histories* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2015), 28.

publication of Hans Joas' work, *The Creativity of Action*. Joas systematically evaluates the way major social thinkers have understood and deployed action as an explanatory category; "...the conception of action... needs to be reconstructed in such a way that...[it]...is no longer confined to the alternative of a model of rational action versus normatively oriented action, but is able to incorporate the creative dimension of human action into its conceptual structure..."¹³² Thus, neo-pragmatists explicitly theorize the sources of creative social action. They see people as creative problem solvers where the ends and means of social action develop coterminously. The theory corrects the constructionists' overemphasis on rationalism. As people confront problems in their daily lives, they experiment and learn. Consequently, and implicit to the ongoing experimentation and learning, the potential to forge new, creative ways of addressing challenges exists.¹³³ More simply, when an object (i.e., a challenge) is perceived, there is an opportunity for creativity. Theoretically, therefore, the disruption of a religious ritual (whatever kind, type, or degree) makes a new opportunity for a person to respond creatively. Non-disrupted rituals would not have this same unique dynamic of creativity. In the matter-of-fact language of my friend, Marwan: "Need is the mother of invention."¹³⁴ In the Jerusalem case, some people come to al-Aqsa Mosque for prayer precisely because Israel blocks the way; other, hearing of the disruption, chose not to pray. The disruption makes an affordance for people to respond creatively.

This view of human agency puts me at odds with Saba Mahmoud, whose insights on the link between religious practices and moral formation were helpful. Her view of human agency is unsatisfactory. She locates agency within the discursive tradition of Islam and makes her case, thus:

¹³² Hans Joas, *The Creativity of Action* (Oxford: Polity Press, 1996), 72.

¹³³ Janson, "Situating Political Innovation: Explaining the Historical Emergence of New Modes of Political Practice," 325-26.

¹³⁴ *haja um al-ikhtira'* Personal interview, al-Ram, Jerusalem, August 21, 2014. Of course, he did not come up with the phrase. I do not know its origins.

Even though I focus on the practices of the mosque participants, this does not mean that their activities and the operations they perform on themselves are products of their independent wills; rather, my argument is that these activities are the products of authoritative discursive traditions whose logic and power far exceeds the consciousness of the subjects they enable. The kind of agency I am exploring here does not belong to the women themselves, but is a product of the historically contingent discursive traditions in which they are located.¹³⁵

Mahmoud's position (which echoes Talal Asad's) sees human agency as entirely subsumed to—and consumed by—the discursive tradition of Islam. The influence of the tradition exceeds the women's consciousness. I have serious concern about this. Mahmoud and Asad dismiss the creative potential of people which is the source of their agentive capacity. As I have shown, people are more than discursive effects and have immense creative potential. Additionally, Mahmoud's analysis is predicated on the assumption that people who desire to perform religious rituals have the means to act on their intention in regular and routinized ways. While the oversight may be excusable given that her research subjects were not subject to the same level of disruption; the point, nonetheless, highlights how Jerusalem is a distinct empirical site, suitable to consider the utility of alternative theoretical paradigms.

In Chapter 1, I argued that improvisation was the appropriate way to understand how Muslims practice their religion in Jerusalem. While on first consideration improvisation might seem haphazard, even whimsical, the concept addresses Mahmoud's weakness. The analogy of a jazz improviser elucidated the connection. The repertoire of themes and motifs develops with time and effort. Improvisation simply takes practice. The acquired skill creates an *affordance* the musician uses to generate a creative expression. And creativity also exists within a broader stockpile of the tradition. The skills of ritual improvisations are generated by peoples' immersion in an environment. They learn a language of creativity and how to live dynamically within the affordances

¹³⁵ Mahmood, *Politics of Piety: The Islamic Revival and the Feminist Subject*, 32.

of the environment. They learn how to express themselves with the various themes, motifs, and techniques that resonate.

In stable social environments, the notion *invention* (discussed above) may sufficiently convey the creative dimension of religious rituals. In Jerusalem, however, where religious rituals are regularly disrupted, invention implies a permanence not afforded to Jerusalem's Muslims. Improvisation works better because the environment is regularly changing. Muslims regularly face new challenges—disruptions—which necessitate improvisations. Muslims adapt their rituals physically and discursively to suit their purposes. Physically, they change the location of their ritual or how they use their bodies to perform it. Discursively, they re-frame the rituals' meaning and purpose.

I have, thus, laid the foundation for my theoretical innovation—that when religious practices are disrupted people are afforded the opportunity to act creatively, and they make improvisations. Since people have an immense agentive capacity, improvisations are dynamic, adaptable, and draw from a repertoire of themes and resources. I hope that this line of reasoning will spark conceptual reinvigoration in how scholars appraise rituals, religion, and tradition among Palestinians.

The Empirical Gap of Piety

In this section, I argue that while researchers have addressed religion among Palestinians in various ways, Muslim religious practices have not been a primary focus of study. I illustrate the veracity of Furani and Rabinowitz's observation that piety has been a neglected area of ethnographic inquiry in Palestine. My work fills this gap. I divide the material into three sub-sections: Ethnography and Religion in Palestine, Religion in Jerusalem, and Ethnography in Jerusalem.

Ethnography and Religion in Palestine

Ethnographers first became interested in Palestine during the late Ottoman Empire. Two were particularly important, Hilma Granqvist and Tawfiq Canaan. Granqvist was an ethnographer from Finland. While her initial impulse had been to understand Biblical texts, she became more

concerned with the negative influence of Western culture on indigenous Palestinians.¹³⁶ She focused on Muslim religious practices in the turbulent time of the British Mandate. Tawfiq Cannan, a Palestinian Jerusalemite, is the second ethnographer from the period. And he, too, discussed Muslim beliefs and practices at length.¹³⁷ Since both ethnographers play an important role in Chapter 4 when I discuss the repertoire of themes Jerusalemite draw from today, I leave further discussion of their contributions until then.

Palestinians, otherwise, remained an ethnographic blind spot until a sharp uptick in the late 1980s.¹³⁸ The trend coincided with two critical developments. First, scholars began questioning the conceptual basis of the nation and nation-state, historicizing their emergence and revealing how they served the interests of dominant ethnic groups, whether in the colonial or metropolitan setting. Dan Rabinowitz labeled this trend the 'demystification of nationalism,' which simultaneously allowed for the rise of subaltern counter-claims, previously silenced by hegemonic powers.¹³⁹ The second (and related) development was the 'crisis of representation' which questioned the concept of modernity and showed how the construction of knowledge and power were intertwined. As a result, Anthropologists questioned their relation to these power structures and developed an 'enabling vocabulary' which allowed Palestinians to become a topic of ethnographic inquiry. Edward Said was a pivotal figure in the development. His work *Orientalism* sparked a massive and ongoing debate about Western knowledge production and

¹³⁶ Furani and Rabinowitz, "The Ethnographic Arriving of Palestine," 478.

¹³⁷ Tawfiq Canaan, *Mohammedan Saints and Sanctuaries in Palestine* (Jerusalem: Ariel Publishing House, 1979 [1927]).

¹³⁸ This paragraph summarizes Furani and Rabinowitz's assessment found in their review article, Furani and Rabinowitz, "The Ethnographic Arriving of Palestine," 481-84.

¹³⁹ Spivak, "Can the Subaltern Speak?"

the Orient.¹⁴⁰ His subsequent work further elaborated the critique with particular reference to the Palestinian case.¹⁴¹

One 'enabling vocabulary' was the discourse of settler-colonial studies. Patrick Wolfe (and others) showed how anthropology had been used to validate colonial rule.¹⁴² Other scholars have used settler-colonial studies to explain the Palestinian experience.¹⁴³ Chapter 4 shows how the settler-colonial paradigm became a useful tool for analyzing Zionism and its effect on Palestinians.

Other ethnographies have focused on various aspects of the Palestinian experience. Topics range from memory construction to suicide bombers, to refugees, resistance, and gender.¹⁴⁴ With their multiple emphases, these studies call attention to the lived experience

¹⁴⁰ Said, *Orientalism*.

¹⁴¹ For example, see Edward W. Said, *The Question of Palestine* (New York: Vintage Books, 1992); "Representing the Colonized: Anthropology's Interlocutors"; Edward W. Said and Christopher Hitchens, *Blaming the Victims: Spurious Scholarship and the Palestinian Question* (London: Verso, 2001).

¹⁴² Patrick Wolfe, *Settler Colonialism and the Transformation of Anthropology: The Politics and Poetics of an Ethnographic Event* (London: Cassell, 1999); "Settler Colonialism and the Elimination of the Native," *Journal of Genocide Research* 8, no. 4 (2006).

¹⁴³ Nadera Shalhoub-Kevorkian, "Human Suffering in Colonial Contexts: Reflections from Palestine," *Settler Colonial Studies* 4, no. 3 (2014); Joseph Massad, *The Persistence of the Palestinian Question: Essays on Zionism and the Palestinians* (New York: Routledge, 2006); Nadera Shalhoub-Kevorkian, *Militarization and Violence against Women in Conflict Zones in the Middle East: A Palestinian Case-Study* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009).

¹⁴⁴ Nasser Abufarha, *The Making of a Human Bomb: An Ethnography of Palestinian Resistance* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2009); John Collins, *Occupied by Memory: The Intifada Generation and the Palestinian State of Emergency* (New York: New York University Press, 2004); Ted Swedenburg, *Memories of Revolt: The 1936-1939 Rebellion and the Palestinian National Past* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1995). Peteet, *Gender in Crisis: Women and the Palestinian Resistance Movement*; Diana Allan, *Refugees of the Revolution: Experiences of Palestinian Exile* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2014); Iris Jean-Klein, "Nationalism and Resistance: The Two Faces of Everyday Activism in Palestine During the Intifada," *Cultural Anthropology* 16, no. 1 (2001); "Mothercraft, Statecraft, and Subjectivity in the Palestinian Intifada," *American Ethnologist* 27, no. 1 (2000); Julie Peteet, "Male Gender and Rituals of Resistance in the Palestinian "Intifada": A Cultural Politics of Violence," *ibid.* 21(1994).

of Palestinians.¹⁴⁵ While these studies have made substantial contributions, the role of piety and religious practices have been largely neglected. I now focus on more contemporary ethnographic studies of Palestinians that address religion directly.

While several studies would be appropriate to evaluate here, I have chosen to focus on Loren Lybarger's book *Identity and Religion in Palestine: The Struggle between Islamism and Secularism in the Occupied Territories*.¹⁴⁶ Two factors contributed to my decision; first, because I have drawn from Lybarger's secular-nationalist and Islamic typologies in subsequent chapters and; second, because he focuses on how Palestinian Muslims understood the Islamic component of their identity. Lybarger acknowledges the common conceptual dividing lines in Palestinian identity; namely, the secular-nationalists and the Islamic milieus and goes further to complicate their traditional conceptualization by examining history, class-structures, and the mobilization tactics of political parties. He offers an intricate and nuanced view of the way Palestinian Muslims understand themselves to be Palestinian. Of all the works I considered, Lybarger gets the closest to unpacking the complex and overlapping relationship between religion and politics on the personal level. He conducted fieldwork in the West Bank and Gaza Strip in the late 1980s and early 1990s. And his depth of analysis reflects his extensive experience and time in the field. In his preface, he states that his purpose is to offer, "a sustained attempt to listen carefully

¹⁴⁵ Laetitia Bucaille, *Growing up Palestinian: Israeli Occupation and the Intifada Generation* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2004); Lisa Taraki, *Living Palestine: Family Survival, Resistance, and Mobility under Occupation* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2006); Saree Makdisi, *Palestine inside Out: An Everyday Occupation* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2008).

¹⁴⁶ Other helpful works include Joel S. Migdal, *Palestinian Society and Politics* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1980); Nels Johnson, *Islam and the Politics of Meaning in Palestinian Nationalism* (London: Kegan Paul International, 1982); Ziad Abu-Amr, *Islamic Fundamentalism in the West Bank and Gaza: Muslim Brotherhood and Islamic Jihad* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1994); Beverly Milton-Edwards, *Islamic Politics in Palestine* (London: I.B. Tauris, 1999); Baruch Kimmerling and Joel S. Migdal, *The Palestinian People: A History* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003); Celia Rothenberg, *Spirits of Palestine: Gender, Society, and the Stories of the Jinn* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2004); Khaled Hroub, *Hamas: A Beginner's Guide* (London: Pluto Press, 2006); Ilan Pappé, *A History of Modern Palestine: One Land, Two Peoples* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006); Roy, *Hamas and Civil Society in Gaza: Engaging the Islamist Social Sector*.

to Palestinians and interpret their choices within a framework informed by historical context, ethnographic observation, and sociological theory.”¹⁴⁷ He accomplishes this goal by allowing his readers to follow the lives of various individuals—male and female, young and old, secular and Islamic—as they wrestle with what it means for them to be Palestinian. Given the bifocal approach of personal voice and religious ideology, Lybarger’s study is essential for the present project.

On the critical level, Lybarger’s study has several shortcomings that highlight the importance of my work. First—and most significantly—Lybarger ignores Jerusalem. The omission is both conceptual and empirical. Conceptually, Lybarger makes only brief reference to the city. To illustrate, among hundreds of terms in the index ‘Jerusalem’ is only referenced twice and indirectly 15-times (*vis-a-vis* related words such as Dome of the Rock, al-Aqsa Mosque, and Church of the Holy Sepulcher).¹⁴⁸ The city is a central national and Islamic symbol. How can religious identity be accurately assessed with only two direct references to Jerusalem? Empirically, the demographics of his ethnographic sample seem also to exclude Jerusalemites. While the omission could be explained reasonably—a deliberate demographic focus, lack of time or resources, etc.—it seems odd given his extensive time in the field. How did he not encounter Jerusalemites? Another weakness of Lybarger’s work is circumstantial and inevitable. It is outdated. Working primarily in the late 1980s and early 1990s, Lybarger gives voice to an Islamic experience which is over 20-years-old. Since his fieldwork, Palestinians have experienced a Second *Intifada*, three Gaza wars, intensified Israeli settlement construction, the building of the separation barrier, and a host of other developments that have negatively affected their society. The work must be updated and reevaluated.

¹⁴⁷ Loren D. Lybarger, *Identity and Religion in Palestine: The Struggle between Islamism and Secularism in the Occupied Territories* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2007), xv.

¹⁴⁸ *Identity and Religion in Palestine: The Struggle between Islamism and Secularism in the Occupied Territories* (Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press, 2007), 257-65.

Religion in Jerusalem

In this section, I evaluate studies that address perceptions of Jerusalem in the broader Islamic world, the city's socio-political dynamics, and religious institutions in the city. The following analysis is interdisciplinary and foregrounds the flexibility of religion in the city. I argue that while Jerusalem has been understood in a variety of productive ways, a robust treatment of the lived Muslim experience lacks. My study fills the gap. Two leading authors are Michael Dumper and Yitzhak Reiter; I address two of their works each, along with one by Hillel Cohen.¹⁴⁹

In 2008, Yitzhak Reiter published *Jerusalem and Its Role in Islamic Solidarity*. The study culls material about Jerusalem written by Muslims across the Islamic world. His concern is not the perspectives of Palestinians or Jerusalemites themselves (though he includes several), but with how Muslims across the globe perceive Jerusalem. He contends that Muslim views on Jerusalem have undergone a substantial transformation since 1967 when Israel occupied East Jerusalem. Reiter calls it a radicalization. In his words, “The yearning to return al-Aqsa and East Jerusalem to a state of indivisible union with Mecca—that is, Jerusalem’s restoration to Muslim sovereignty—lies at the heart of an awareness-raising campaign that is currently being waged in various parts of the Muslim world.”¹⁵⁰ Jerusalem has, indeed, become the grand political rallying force in the Islamic world. And Reiter’s concern is the political implications of that campaign. His well documented and empirically rich study makes it difficult to dispute the core thrust of his argument. His discussion on the ‘Dynamic Sanctity’ of Holy places (Chapter 2) is particularly compelling and relevant for the current study. Reiter shows that, for Muslims, the Holiness of Jerusalem has changed significantly over time. His analysis aligns with the

¹⁴⁹ Other works in this category include, Meron Benvenisti, *City of Stone: The Hidden History of Jerusalem* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1996); David Hulme, *Identity, Ideology, and the Future of Jerusalem* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006); Roger Friedland and Richard D. Hecht, *To Rule Jerusalem* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996b).

¹⁵⁰ *Jerusalem and Its Role in Islamic Solidarity* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan), 3.

phenomenological nature of my argument—he emphasizes the flexibility of religious traditions and perceptions of history.

On the critical side, I have two issues with Reiter's work. First, the study is poorly structured. It reads much like an edited volume where separate papers were brought together with surface level editing and superficial regard for structural flow. The weakness comes through clearly by its unnecessary repetition; Sheikh al-Qaradawi, for example, the great Sunni Islamic cleric, is mentioned six times for authoring the book *Jerusalem is the Problem of Every Muslim*. Only in its first occurrence does the reader gain new insight on the book. Second, Reiter's argument completely neglects the role of Israeli actions in precipitating the radicalization he describes. The causality of his argument is one-sided. In his review of the work, Craig Larkin foregrounded the point:

His [Reiter's] assumptions on how religious discourse shapes political policy and public perception must also be observed in reverse. How are contemporary Israeli policies (settlements, separation barrier, closure of PA in Jerusalem) influencing Palestinian and Muslim discourses on the city's holy sites?¹⁵¹

Israeli actions have played a substantial role in fomenting the changing perceptions. Larkin's critique is a summons for the present study: How do Israeli disruptions influence Muslim perceptions of the city? The question touches on the core concern of my study.

Multiple studies have addressed sociopolitical dynamics in the city.¹⁵² Hillel Cohen's work *The Rise and Fall of Arab Jerusalem: Politics and the City since 1967* is a prime example. One helpful part of Cohen's work is the four broad (and somewhat overlapping) categories he develops to understand Jerusalemites today. While I aim to add

¹⁵¹ Craig Larkin, "Reiter: Jerusalem and Its Role in Islamic Solidarity," *Jerusalem Quarterly*, no. 39 (2009): 84.

¹⁵² Hillel Cohen, *The Rise and Fall of Arab Jerusalem: Politics and the City since 1967* (New York: Routledge, 2010). Other equally relevant examples include Menachem Klein, *Jerusalem: The Contested City* (London: Hurst & Company, 2001); Moshe Ma'oz and Sari Nusseibeh, *Jerusalem: Points of Friction, and Beyond* (The Hague: Kluwer Law International, 2000); Madelaine Adelman and Miriam Fendius Elman, *Jerusalem: Conflict and Cooperation in a Contested City* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2014); Michael Dumper, *The Politics of Jerusalem since 1967* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997).

complexity to the often oversimplified or sensationalized characterizations of Muslims, Cohen's typologies remain helpful as a general orientation for how Jerusalem's Muslims understand their religious belonging. In Weberian terms, these categories could be understood as 'ideal types.'¹⁵³ Cohen's first 'type' is the *Islamic approach* which is marked by religious belief and fervor. These believers see themselves as continuing in the path of Omar Ibn al-Khattab and Saladin. "From their perspective, the worse it becomes, the better it will be."¹⁵⁴ Their difficulties are seen as temporary. They live with the Islamic vision of the future in mind. Because of their strong religious commitment, they do not experience the same identity crisis as their peers. This category includes subgroups such as *Hizb ut-Tahrir*, *Salafiyun*, *Da'wa*, and *Islamic Jihad*. The second type is the *passive approach*. These Jerusalemites are not necessarily apathetic; they simply feel they have no viable means to act. While they have red-lines such as threats to the *Haram al-Sharif* which mobilize them politically, "The Palestinian identity of these people is comatose."¹⁵⁵ The third category is the *activist approach*. Though limited in number, they work to find a solution to the conflict. They are often willing to work alongside Israelis, although Israel's unilateral actions are very problematic for them. The fourth category is the *nationalist approach*. These are people who still adhere to Fatah's national vision. This group is weak in contemporary Jerusalem; many have blended into the other three approaches. Cohen's categorization is compelling on a broad scale because it gives a basic framework to understand Jerusalemite political-religious and it shows how political-religious mobilization is flexible and changes with time. The analysis lacks in that it ignores religious practices. It reifies the analytical proclivity to prioritize the cognitive and rational dimensions of belief while neglecting the role of ritual practices in constituting belief.

¹⁵³ Susan J. Hekman, *Weber, the Ideal Type, and Contemporary Social Theory* (Elkhart, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1983).

¹⁵⁴ Cohen, *The Rise and Fall of Arab Jerusalem: Politics and the City since 1967*, 131.

¹⁵⁵ *The Rise and Fall of Arab Jerusalem: Politics and the City since 1967*, 132.

In a similar vein to Cohen's work, Michael Dumper's *Jerusalem Unbound: Geography, History, and the Future of the Holy City* connects well with the present study. Dumper links political manipulation with religion's inherent flexibility.¹⁵⁶ His main argument is that if Jerusalem is to be understood, it must be viewed in light of its multi-dimensional borders. The city has hard political borders, soft social borders, scattered borders of holiness, and international borders.¹⁵⁷ By taking the multi-bordered approach, the city can be understood as a whole. In his third chapter, 'Scattered Borders of Holiness,' Dumper invites readers to a personal, even intimate, account of the city's religious life. In a vivid portrayal of the start of Shabbat at the Western Wall and its convergence with the evening call to prayer from Al-Aqsa Mosque, "The city seemed alive with prayer and praise for the Almighty. At least for this short moment, one could put aside the cynicism about how religious beliefs have been manipulated in the conflict and see and feel the beauty of the city stripped down to its prayerful core."¹⁵⁸ Indeed, the Holy character of Jerusalem can only truly be experienced in both time and space; and, yes, religion has been manipulated for political gain. After this, Dumper engages in a brief discussion of what makes a city Holy and reminds his readers that, "the very air you breathe is part of the conflict."¹⁵⁹ Sacred sites are much more than physical structures and geographical locations:

They become tied up with a community's sense of identity, its values and its principles. Their presence is internalized, and the attachment to them pervades all sectors and classes, having resonance beyond

¹⁵⁶ *Jerusalem Unbound: Geography, History, and the Future of the Holy City*.

¹⁵⁷ He outlines the historical development and present state of the 'Hard Borders' which are political and territorial. He discusses the 'Softer Borders' of the city which are on display through social, professional, and educational interactions between Palestinians and Israelis. Thirdly, and most pertinent to our current study, he discusses the "Scattered Borders of Holiness," where the political and social dimensions of the three faith communities are on display. Fourthly, before addressing the prospects a negotiated solution to the conflict, Dumper highlights the role the various international actors play in checking Israel's free reign over the city.

¹⁵⁸ *Jerusalem Unbound: Geography, History, and the Future of the Holy City*, 98.

¹⁵⁹ *Jerusalem Unbound: Geography, History, and the Future of the Holy City*, 102.

the sphere of personal piety and touching on the very basis and integrity of the community.¹⁶⁰

Dumper is right to observe the dynamic. I take the observation a step further, disentangling the links between personal piety and communal identity.

Narrowing his focus to the Islamic aspects of Jerusalem, Dumper gives a brief and updated account of his previous work on the Islamic *Waqf* in Jerusalem, which I analyze shortly. Of all the sociopolitical studies on Jerusalem, Dumper's comes closest to presenting a contextually sensitive portrayal of the lived Islamic dimensions of the city. One cannot help but notice, however, that his sympathetic description is almost exclusively embedded in his voice, a western academic. Scattered comments by community leaders aside, one wonders—where are the voices of the Palestinian Muslims who live in Dumper's unbound city?

I now turn to two institutional cases where religion and politics have been intertwined. Two early studies dealing with Islam in contemporary Jerusalem were Michael Dumper's *Islam and Israel: Muslim Religious Endowments and the Jewish State*, and Yitzhak Reiter's *Islamic Institutions in Jerusalem: Palestinian Muslim Organization under Jordanian and Israeli Rule*.¹⁶¹ As the titles indicate, both authors dissect the political dimensions of administering Islamic endowments in Jerusalem.¹⁶² Dumper, being broader in scope, is not concerned with Jerusalem exclusively. He examines the historical development of *waqf* (religious endowment) administration in various

¹⁶⁰ *Jerusalem Unbound: Geography, History, and the Future of the Holy City*, 102-03.

¹⁶¹ Michael Dumper, *Islam and Israel: Muslim Religious Endowments and the Jewish State* (Washington, D.C.: Institute for Palestine Studies, 1994); Yitzhak Reiter, *Islamic Institutions in Jerusalem: Palestinian Muslim Organization under Jordanian and Israeli Rule* (The Hague: Kluwer Law International, 1996b).

¹⁶² For further treatment of the geographical and architectural dimensioned of the conflict in Jerusalem, see Rivka Gonen, *Contested Holiness: Jewish, Muslim, and Christian Perspectives on the Temple Mount in Jerusalem*; Wendy Pullan et al., *The Struggle for Jerusalem's Holy Places* (New York: Routledge, 2013); Michael Dumper, *The Politics of Sacred Space: The Old City of Jerusalem in the Middle East Conflict* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, 2002). For a broader discussion of Sacred space in Israel-Palestine, see Marshall J. Breger, Yitzhak Reiter, and Leonard M. Hammer, *Sacred Space in Israel and Palestine: Religion and Politics* (London: Routledge, 2012).

locations throughout Israel-Palestine. He dedicates one chapter to Jerusalem and analyzes the origins of Israel's tenuous relationship with the *waqf*. Dumper points out that on June 29 (less than three weeks after the 1967 war) Israel dissolved the East Jerusalem municipality but chose not to exert the same destructive force over the *Waqf*. He poses two questions: Why? and, With what implications? He explains that the primary reason for Israel's reluctance was, "the risk of provoking intense pan-Islamic and international opprobrium."¹⁶³ Jerusalem was Islam's third holiest site, and the Islamic endowments were the primary mechanism for administrating and mediating its holiness. Regarding the implications, it would seem that continued presence of the *Waqf* in East Jerusalem would have positioned the institution to assume a more robust role in administrating the city. Israel, however, not wanting this to happen, worked actively to prevent its ascendancy. The two ways Israel accomplished this were an active program to implement a 'Judaization' of Jerusalem and a concerted effort to gain control of land. "It is in Jerusalem... more than in any other city in Palestine, that the political role played by the *waqf* system in the central feature of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict—the acquisition of land—is revealed."¹⁶⁴ Israel's effort to change the culture and control of the city sparked a revival of Islamic interest, both locally and globally. Funding was made available to the Islamic *Waqf* by oil-rich Arab countries which invested in Islamic properties and the Palestinian community. Here, the dynamics of disruption and improvisation become apparent in an institutional case.¹⁶⁵

Building on Dumper's work, Yitzhak Reiter gives a more detailed treatment of the *waqf* system in Jerusalem in his monograph, *Islamic Institutions in Jerusalem*.¹⁶⁶ He covers similar material but goes further by adding a detailed exploration of the *Shari'a* Courts. Israeli

¹⁶³ Dumper, *Islam and Israel: Muslim Religious Endowments and the Jewish State*, 107.

¹⁶⁴ *Islam and Israel: Muslim Religious Endowments and the Jewish State*, 103-04.

¹⁶⁵ In a separate and later work, Dumper argues that on account of Israeli disruptions, *Shari'a* courts in Jerusalem have had to make 'substantial innovations.' *The Politics of Sacred Space: The Old City of Jerusalem in the Middle East Conflict*, 93-95.

¹⁶⁶ *Islamic Institutions in Jerusalem: Palestinian Muslim Organization under Jordanian and Israeli Rule*.

administrative constraints disrupted them, but those constraints, ultimately, led to the *waqfs* renaissance. Loss of sovereignty revived interest and Islamic zeal toward the city, he observes. Budgets, endowments, popular religious practices, all increased in the period after the 1967 war; "...the political role of Islam was accentuated. The defensive conception of Islam continued to exist under Israeli rule in Jerusalem, but alongside one of revivalism and radicalism."¹⁶⁷ Here, disruption leads to revival. While Reiter's political frame is unproblematic, one wonders if he can treat the issue even-handedly: he is an Israeli academic deeply involved in the political system. A further weakness of Reiter's work is his conceptualization of Islam. He portrays Islam in the classic orientalist dichotomy as either being orthodox or popular Islam.¹⁶⁸ He is self-conscious of the weakness but only gives a half-hearted effort at the end of the book to make up for it.

In this section, I have shown that scholars have focused on religion and politics and Jerusalem, but their concern has primarily been dissecting the relationship between them. These studies, on the whole, demonstrate that Jerusalem and Islam have been understood in productive ways. There is a clear sense of the entanglement between religion and politics—religion being flexible and politics being disruptive. Yet no study treats Muslim religious practices robustly.

Ethnography in Jerusalem

Relatively few ethnographic studies focus on Jerusalem. Given the copious amount of research done on the city, the lack may be surprising. In this section, I discuss the work of Glen Bowman and his explanation for the ethnographic dearth. I touch briefly on several dated ethnographic studies and then look specifically at the contributions of Subhi Ghosheh and Ali Qleibo. I spend the most time evaluating Thomas Abowd's *Colonial Jerusalem*. I conclude with a discussion of an article by Ron Geaves, the one ethnographic treatment of Muslim

¹⁶⁷ *Islamic Endowments in Jerusalem under British Mandate* (Portland, OR: Frank Cass), 97.

¹⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

religious practices in Jerusalem. I argue that while each author has made a meaningful contribution, none have addressed the particular influence of Israel's settler-colonial project on Muslim religious practices. My work fills that gap.

Glen Bowman is one of three international researchers to have conducted extended ethnographic work in Jerusalem.¹⁶⁹ He has examined the politics of administration of the Holy Sepulchre and various Palestinian issues more broadly.¹⁷⁰ The study of most direct import to my present objective is his article "Viewing the Holy City: An Anthropological Perspectivalism." Bowman reasons that other methods of academic inquiry are necessary, but they fail to replace the contribution of extended ethnographic engagement. While he makes a summons for more ethnography, Bowman gives three reasons for the ethnographic paucity. First, he criticizes anthropologists, generally, for being more interested in rural settings than urban.¹⁷¹ Second, he points out that Jerusalem has experienced a bifurcation in anthropological study; on the one hand, they have focused on connecting Jerusalem to its past, expanding Biblical and ancient social histories (recall figures such as Hilma Granqvist); on the other, they have focused on politically significant developments. He argues that it has been, "dedicated less to the close observation and analysis of social and cultural configurations than to setting out political problems and proposing solutions to them, or at least suggesting means of accessing alternative futures to those dire

¹⁶⁹ The other two being Thomas Abowd and Rochelle Davis. I discuss Thomas Abowd's work shortly. Rochelle Davis' work is primarily historical ethnography, recording Palestinian memories of the 1948 war. Her work included Jerusalemites but does not treat them exclusively: Rochelle A. Davis, *Palestinian Village Histories: Geographies of the Displaced* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2010).

¹⁷⁰ "A Weeping on the Road to Bethlehem: Contestation over the Uses of Rache's Tomb," *Religion Compass* 7, no. 3 (2013b); "Popular Palestinian Practices around Holy Places and Those Who Oppose Them: An Historical Introduction," *Religion Compass* 7, no. 3 (2013a). "The Two Deaths of Basem Rishmawi: Identity Constructions and Reconstructions in a Muslim-Christian Palestinian Community," *Identities: Global Studies in Culture and Power* 8, no. 1 (2001). "Unholy Struggle on Holy Ground: Conflict and Interpretation in Jerusalem," *Anthropology Today* 2, no. 3 (1986); "In Dubious Battle on the Plains of Heav'n': The Politics of Possession in Jerusalem's Holy Sepulchre," *History and Anthropology* 22, no. 3 (2011).

¹⁷¹ "Viewing the Holy City: An Anthropological Perspectivalism," *Jerusalem Quarterly* 31: 27-28.

futures conditions seem to predict.”¹⁷² The work he describes might best be characterized as political ethnography, and I made observations about the value of this genre of work in the previous section.

Finally, Bowman explains the ethnographic-lack on the basis of the identity and positionality of the researchers conducting the ethnographies.¹⁷³ He analyzes positional difficulties of Israeli and Palestinian ethnographers. I discuss both and add a third, internationals. First, when Israeli anthropologists study Jerusalem, they have two problems: competing loyalties and access. How can they even-handedly analyze the ‘other’ society that challenges the researcher’s national interests? Which is more important, fidelity to their community or the Palestinians they study? Thorny issues arise. Israeli ethnographers are severely criticized for this. Dan Rabinowitz cast light on the problem in his previously discussed article, “Oriental Othering and National Identity: A review of Early Israeli Anthropological Studies of Palestinians.”¹⁷⁴ Not only have Israelis been caught in the trap of their own competing loyalties, but they have also had difficulty gaining access. The reason is obvious—Palestinians perceive the Israeli’s competing allegiances and refuse to participate. Second, Palestinians have neglected the ethnographic study of their own society. While, given their linguistic skills and cultural proximity, they would make excellent candidates, they have chosen to focus on more urgent matters, resisting occupation and advocating for their political rights. Ethnography is seen as a luxury they cannot afford.¹⁷⁵ A few notable exceptions exist, however, and I discuss their work shortly. Finally, internationals have had difficulty conducting ethnography in Jerusalem. While the city has been the focus of extensive international attention, the attention has primarily been political. International ethnographers

¹⁷² "Viewing the Holy City: An Anthropological Perspectivalism," *Jerusalem Quarterly* 31: 28.

¹⁷³ "Viewing the Holy City: An Anthropological Perspectivalism," 29-30.

¹⁷⁴ "Oriental Othering and National Identity: A Review of Early Israeli Anthropological Studies of Palestinians," *Identities: Global Studies in Culture and Power* 9, no. 3 (2002).

¹⁷⁵ Bowman, "Viewing the Holy City: An Anthropological Perspectivalism."

face challenges such as language competency, access, and personal risk. I need not discuss these issues here since I covered these dynamics in Chapter 2. In a sentence, my experience was analogous to other internationals. A lack of ethnographic engagement in Jerusalem becomes understandable, given the endogenous challenges with researcher positionality—be the ethnographer Israel, Palestinian, or international. Yet some work has been done.

The earliest example of an ethnographic treatment of Jerusalem is Victor Azarya's work on the social life in the Armenian Quarter.¹⁷⁶ The next major contribution was about language. Spolsky and Cooper examined how Jewish migrant communities related to Arabic, Hebrew, and the languages of their home countries.¹⁷⁷ In the same year, Michael Romann and Alex Weingrod published the work, *Living Together Separately: Arabs and Jews in Contemporary Jerusalem*.¹⁷⁸ Their concern was how Israelis and Palestinians conducted their daily lives in Jerusalem.¹⁷⁹ They examined urban spaces, how ethnic identities impacted Palestinian-Israeli relations and various environments such as workspaces and hospitals. While I could critique the work's credentials as an ethnography (it often comes across as more sociological) or the fact that material is outdated, the study makes a substantial contribution.

Two Jerusalemite ethnographers have made contributions, Subhi Ghosheh and Ali Qleibo. Both have worked to document Palestinian cultural life in light of Israeli disruptions. Subhi Ghosheh's work, *Jerusalem: Arab Social Life, Traditions, and Everyday Pleasures in the 20th Century*,¹⁸⁰ is a personal—even intimate—account of contemporary

¹⁷⁶ Victor Azarya, *The Armenian Quarter of Jerusalem* (Berkeley CA: University of California Press, 1984).

¹⁷⁷ Bernard Spolsky and Robert L. Cooper, *The Languages of Jerusalem* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991).

¹⁷⁸ Michael Romann and Alex Weingrod, *Living Together Separately: Arabs and Jews in Contemporary Jerusalem* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1991).

¹⁷⁹ A similar work published five years later was Friedland and Hecht, *To Rule Jerusalem*.

¹⁸⁰ *Jerusalem: Arab Social Life, Traditions, and Everyday Pleasures in the 20th Century*, trans. Bassam Abou Ghazalah (Northampton, MA: Olive Branch Press, 2013).

cultural life in the city. The study's strength is its weakness. Ghosheh appreciates the depth, breadth, and nuance of cultural life in the city, but the work comes across as too emotionally invested and, in places, reads like a nostalgic lament turned cultural-memoir. Additionally, he gives virtually no account of his research methods, resting his authority solely on his Jerusalemite identity. Yet, as I am aware, he spent his entire adult life in Amman, Jordan. From an intellectual and academic perspective, this is problematic.

Next, Ali Qleibo's *Before the Mountains Disappear: an Ethnographic Chronicle of the Modern Palestinians* is a helpful study for understanding cultural practices around death, food, resistance, religion, and other facets of Palestinian life.¹⁸¹ His chapter entitled 'A Dynasty of Prophets' gives keen insight into the social and religious power structures that governed life in Jerusalem historically:

The city of Jerusalem, if it is distinguished at all, it is due to its noble families descending from the family of the Prophet, from the offspring of the companions of the Prophet Mohammed who came to live and pray in the Haram es-Sherif complex in the early days of the Muslim conquest, or the Mujaheddin [warriors] and theologians who accompanied Salah-el-Din during the Crusades.¹⁸²

Qleibo also gives a vivid, highly personalized, account of the customs and traditions associated with Ramadan in Jerusalem, inviting the reader to experience the celebration alongside him. I draw from this work more in Chapter 6.

The most substantive and contemporary ethnographic treatment of Jerusalem is Thomas Abowd's *Colonial Jerusalem: The Spatial Construction of Identity and Difference in a City of Myth, 1948-2012*.¹⁸³ If contemporary Jerusalem is to be understood, Abowd argues, one must grasp the spatial construction of identity and difference within the city—created, justified, and exerted through Israeli colonial practices.

¹⁸¹ Ali H. Qleibo, *Before the Mountains Disappear: An Ethnographic Chronicle of the Modern Palestinians* (Cairo: Kloreus Book, 1992).

¹⁸² *Before the Mountains Disappear: An Ethnographic Chronicle of the Modern Palestinians* (Cairo: Kloreus Book, 1992), 119.

¹⁸³ Thomas Philip Abowd, *Colonial Jerusalem: The Spatial Construction of Identity and Difference in a City of Myth, 1948-2012* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2014).

As a result, the reframing of myth, meaning, and memory become integral parts of the national identities of both Israelis and Palestinians. He argues that the dynamic has, “...Ossified boundaries of the imagination and the fortified divides of the mind.”¹⁸⁴ To unpack the thesis, Abowd details Palestinian history—and Israeli reframing—through several case studies. He gives a compelling treatment of the Baramki house and its transformation into an Israeli national icon called the Tourjeman Post.¹⁸⁵ His work on the Moroccan quarter’s destruction shortly after the 1967 War and its subsequent refashioning into the Western Wall Plaza were eerily elucidating.¹⁸⁶ With these examples (and others), Abowd supports his thesis well.

The link between his work and mine is his analytical focus on Israeli colonial practices. Abowd draws from leading critical theorists in the field (Partick Wolfe, for example) to ground his arguments. He persuasively applies Mary Douglas’ argument from *Purity and Danger* to the lived experience of Jerusalemites, demonstrating how colonial subjugation fashions their identity—they are ‘dirt’ or ‘pollution’ which must be discarded to fulfill the Israeli colonial vision.¹⁸⁷ Critically, Abowd fails to apply his insights to the way colonial processes influence Palestinian perceptions of religion. While the shortfall could be explained by an empirical focus on physical places or the simple lack of space, one can’t help but wonder why Palestinian religion did not figure more prominently into his analysis.

While ethnographic work on Muslim religious practices in Jerusalem is almost non-existent, one article has been published. Ron Geaves wrote, “‘That Which We Have Forgotten’: The Emergence of ‘Traditional Islam’ as a New Movement in Global Muslim Religious

¹⁸⁴ *Colonial Jerusalem: The Spatial Construction of Identity and Difference in a City of Myth, 1948-2012* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2014), 14.

¹⁸⁵ *Colonial Jerusalem: The Spatial Construction of Identity and Difference in a City of Myth, 1948-2012*, 90-106.

¹⁸⁶ *Colonial Jerusalem: The Spatial Construction of Identity and Difference in a City of Myth, 1948-2012*, 112-29.

¹⁸⁷ *Colonial Jerusalem: The Spatial Construction of Identity and Difference in a City of Myth, 1948-2012*, 7, 119-20, 54; Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of Concepts of Pollution and Taboo* (London: Routledge Classics, 2002).

Contestation.” He focuses on Sufis in contemporary Jerusalem. Geaves correctly identifies a strong link between Sufis in Jerusalem and their engagement at al-Aqsa Mosque.¹⁸⁸ He also asserts that one of the central factors sidelining Sufi presence in Jerusalem is the unwillingness of Sufi leaders to address the political context of their fellow Palestinians directly. This, too, is correct. Geaves’ article lacks in several ways, however. He argues that Sufism has survived in Jerusalem on account of its intellectualization; “Some are now returning to Sufism where they can combine academia, culture and Islamic knowledge, presenting an indigenous option for intellectual endeavor with an historic heritage in the Middle East.”¹⁸⁹ He explains the process by citing efforts of several ‘Sufi-oriented’ professors at al-Quds University, seeking to form a partnership between female law students and *fiqh* scholars who would teach non-politicized Islamic sciences.¹⁹⁰ When I brought up Geaves’ claim with several Sufi leaders in Jerusalem and professors at al-Quds university, they had never heard of such efforts—they were shocked such a claim had been made.¹⁹¹ No ‘intellectualization’ of Sufism in Jerusalem existed. Geaves was simply wrong. Fortunately at the article’s outset, Geaves made an important disclaimer: “These theories for the revival of Sufism [in Jerusalem] are anecdotal and impressionistic and would require further ethnographic study to establish their validity.”¹⁹² I highlight the disclaimer since Geaves, himself, holds his conclusions loosely and because it serves as a summons for my study. Geaves’ article, while flawed, is a good starting point for this study.

¹⁸⁸ Geaves, "That Which We Have Forgotten': The Emergence of 'Traditional Islam' as a New Movement in Global Muslim Religious Contestation," 43.

¹⁸⁹ "That Which We Have Forgotten': The Emergence of 'Traditional Islam' as a New Movement in Global Muslim Religious Contestation," 44.

¹⁹⁰ "That Which We Have Forgotten': The Emergence of 'Traditional Islam' as a New Movement in Global Muslim Religious Contestation," 43.

¹⁹¹ It is possible there was no time overlap in the tenure of the faculty members I interviewed and the initiators of the project Geaves is referencing. Even if Geaves’ argument was accurate at the time of his writing, it was not during mine.

¹⁹² "That Which We Have Forgotten': The Emergence of 'Traditional Islam' as a New Movement in Global Muslim Religious Contestation," 44.

Conclusion: Theory and Piety

This Chapter has contributed to my overall argument by unpacking the theoretical underpinning of my research and the need for an empirical focus on piety in Palestine. In the first section, I demonstrated how the Anthropology of Islam provides a solid conceptual foundation. The field gives an appreciation for the diversity of Muslim expressions and experiences, and sensitivity to colonial legacies which creates space for a robust treatment of religious practices. While there had been an appreciation for the power of rituals, the area had been neglected because theorists favored other theoretical paradigms. Scholars such as Saba Mahmoud began to re-theorize the role of religious rituals, arguing that they created meaning in people's lives. But no study had been conducted on Palestinians with this specific insight in mind. I demonstrated, also, how the unique dynamic of disruptions in Jerusalem created a fertile ground for conceptual reinvigoration since disruptions create affordances for improvisation.

In the empirical section, I showed that Muslim religious practices in Jerusalem have received little treatment. Aside from a few studies conducted during the British Mandate Period, Palestine remained an ethnographic blind spot until the 1980s when an 'enabling vocabulary' emerged. I discussed the contribution of ethnographic studies that addressed the issue of religion in Palestine. I then evaluated non-ethnographic treatments of Islam in Jerusalem. And I observed that while these studies were primarily focused on politics, the inherent flexibility of religion began to emerge. I concluded by discussing ethnographies in Jerusalem. Thomas Abowd made the most substantial contribution. He used the concept of settler-colonialism to understand how memory and identity were shaped and refashioned in Jerusalem for Israeli colonial purposes. Ron Geaves has published one provisional ethnographic study on Muslim piety, but more work needed to be done. Thus, I have demonstrated the veracity of Furani and Rabinowitz's observation from the chapter's outset—that Palestine could be a sight for 'conceptual reinvigoration' and that piety had been a neglected topic

of study. In a sentence, I aim to invigorate theoretical debate and fill the empirical gap.

Chapter 4

The Repertoire of Themes

I argued in Chapter 1 that improvisation is a practiced skill—that jazz musicians woodshed to develop it and that practicing broadens their repertoire of themes to draw from spontaneously. In this chapter, I unpack the repertoire of themes Jerusalemites draw from as they perform their religious practices. Each theme has a genealogy, and I begin with an overview of the way Palestinian Muslims, generally, understand the sacred texts and key historical events. These comprise the core motifs in Jerusalemite’s repertoire of themes.¹⁹³ I argue that these themes cast an (un)disrupted vision for Muslim religious practices in the city. I next explore how the repertoire was expanded to include Palestinian nationalism. The national movement created a shared solidarity among Palestinians across geographic and religious lines; villagers and urbanites, Muslims and Christians. I argue that the national project’s gestation aligns with the ‘invention of tradition’ typology discussed in Chapter 3. One Jerusalemite leader, Hajj Amin al-Husseini, was especially influential in shaping this theme. He used his religious authority as Grand Mufti to blur the lines between religious and national rituals. He consolidated the national imagination by linking the abstract idea of nationalism to bodily and communal ritual practices.

From its inception, the Palestinian national project has included resistance and a drive for emancipation, and these are the next elements I develop in the repertoire of themes. Zionism began as a political ideology among Jews in Eastern Europe and developed into to a full-blown national movement through the process of settler-colonialism. Zionism aimed to establish an Israeli State, and since Palestinians stood in the way, they would need to be eliminated. Settler-colonialism, therefore, has been an immensely disruptive force, a structure of disruption, for Palestinians. To flesh out this structural

¹⁹³ Where there are tensions between general perceptions and specific historical facts, I discuss them in the footnotes.

disruption, I look at the wars of 1948 and 1967, focusing particularly on Jerusalem. As a result of the disruptive wars, Palestinians rearticulated and adapted their national project. Yasser Arafat headed the project, framing Palestinian nationalism around traditional and religious themes. Nationalism and resistance, thus, became dominant features of the broader repertoire of ritual themes.

The next major motifs developed in tandem with political events that have occurred since 1967. I argue that the First *Intifada* added the theme of nonviolent resistance and that the Oslo Period gave Palestinians the idea that grassroots mobilization could affect political change. With the rise of Hamas and in the Second *Intifada*, a discursively emphatic view of Islam and an emphasis on violence were also included in the growing repertoire of themes. While these themes may not have been new in a literal sense, they are significant because they fill the memories of living Palestinians, the people with whom I conducted this study. These developments illustrate the improvisational dynamic of Palestinian political mobilization; and that mobilization is important precisely because the lines between religion and nationalism, resistance, and emancipation are inherently blurred (See Chapter 1). Before concluding, I look at the structure of disruption in Jerusalem through the lens of specific political, legal, economic, and social events. I explore how they influence the daily lives of Jerusalemites. While Jerusalemites have clung tightly to their Jerusalemite identity, these disruptions have made it all too clear that, as a city for Palestinians, Jerusalem is severely weakened and deeply threatened. One should expect, therefore, that these developments influence how Muslims in Jerusalem understand, articulate, and perform their religious practices. Jerusalemites have had little choice but to improvise. My work in this chapter benefited from the analysis of Nels Johnson who, in his book *Islam and the Politics of Meaning in Palestinian Nationalism* (1982), discussed the ideological formation and evolution of Islam within Palestinian society.

Islam in Jerusalem: an (Un)disrupted Vision



*The Dome of the Rock (Left). View of the Dome from within (Right).
Photo Credit (Masjid al-Aqsa 2016).*

Jerusalem's Dome of the Rock is beauty par-excellence. And Muslims believe, generally, that when Umayyad Caliph, 'Abd al-Malik constructed the dome in 692, he aimed to enshrine Muhammad's ascent to the heavens in his Night Journey.¹⁹⁴ And since its completion, the devout and doubters have traveled immeasurable lengths throughout time and space to gaze upon the dome's magnificence. Even with the contemporary conflict, a staggering 10-million people visit the sacred compound yearly.¹⁹⁵ My purpose in this section is to outline the core elements of the Muslim Jerusalemite repertoire of theological and historical themes, their (un)disrupted vision of the city.

Muhammad's Night Journey was summarily recorded in *Surat al-'Isra'*:

Glory to (Allah) Who did take His Servant [Muhammad] for Journey by night from the Sacred Mosque to the Farthest Mosque whose precincts We did bless—in order that We might show him some of Our Signs: for He is the one Who heareth and seeth (all things).¹⁹⁶

¹⁹⁴ Scholars, however, debate 'Abd al-Malik's intention. While some do argue that he built it to commemorate Muhammad's ascent to heaven (Grabar), others claim it was built to surpass the grandeur of the Church of the Holy Sepulcher. Others still argue that it was designed to commemorate the interfaith significance of the location, given the inscribed Qur'anic pass discussing Moses, Jesus, and Mary. Oleg Grabar, *The Shape of the Holy: Early Islamic Jerusalem* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996); Bruce B. Lawrence, *The Qur'an: A Biography* (New York: Grove Press, 2006), Ch 4; PASSIA, "A Guide to Al-Aqsa Mosque: Al-Haram Ash-Sharif," ed. *Palestinian Academic Society for the Study of International Affairs* (Jerusalem, 2013).

¹⁹⁵ International Crisis Group (ICG), "The Status of the Status Quo at Jerusalem's Holy Esplanade," in *Middle East Report* (2015), 10.

¹⁹⁶ *The Holy Quran*, al-'Isra' 17:1.

The ‘Sacred Mosque’ the verse references is in Mecca, and al-Aqsa is the Farthest Mosque, in Jerusalem.¹⁹⁷ On Muhammad’s Night Journey, Gabriel accompanied the prophet through the seven heavens. As they ascended, the two encountered prophets—Adam, John the Baptist, Jesus, Joseph, Idris, Aaron, Moses, and Abraham. After entering God’s presence, Mohammad was given a divine decree that he and his followers must pray 50-times a day. On the return journey, however, Moses stopped Muhammad and told him that praying 50-times a day would be too difficult. He advised that Muhammad should go back and ask for a reprieve. Muhammad reascended and, after several negotiations, both God and Muhammad agreed that his followers should pray five times a day.¹⁹⁸ After Muhammad returned from the Night Journey to Mecca, he announced the new mandate, and his followers began prostrating for prayer five times a day—facing Jerusalem. Jerusalem, thus, became *al-Qibli*, the direction of prayer. This divine injunction stayed in effect approximately 13 months until Muhammad received another revelation abrogating it and making Mecca the new *Qibli*.¹⁹⁹ This is why, when Muslims refer to Jerusalem today, they often call it *Awal al-Qiblitayn*, the first of the two prayer directions.

To commemorate this historical and religious legacy, ‘Abd al-Malik constructed the *Qibli* Mosque. He began construction in 692, the same year he began the Dome of the Rock, but the structure was not completed until 714 by his son, al-Waleed. Today, the *Qibli* Mosque is widely regarded as the second most iconic feature of Jerusalem’s cityscape. The mosque is located south of the Dome of the Rock at the southernmost wall of the sacred compound. In common parlance, Muslims often refer to the *Qibli* Mosque as al-Aqsa Mosque, but this is

¹⁹⁷ ‘Farthest’ is the literal translation of the Arabic word *al-Aqsa*.

¹⁹⁸ al-Tabari, *The History of Al-Tabari: Volume Vi Muhammad at Mecca*, trans. Montgomery Watt and M.V. McDonald (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1987), 77-79. Several interviewees also related this narrative to me personally. For example, see: Personal Interview, Al-Ram East Jerusalem, September 21, 2015.

¹⁹⁹ The revelation is often dated to the time Muhammad left Mecca for Medina and is recorded in al-Baqara 2:114. “We have seen the turning of thy face unto the sky; and now we shall turn thee a way that shall well please thee. So turn thou thy face towards the Inviolable Mosque [the *Ka’aba* in Mecca]; and wheresoever ye may be, turn ye your faces towards it.”

technically a mis-designation; the *Qibli* Mosque is, in fact, a prayer hall within the larger al-Aqsa Mosque compound.

Approximately 55 years before ‘Abd al-Malik’s building projects, however, another seminal—and equally significant—event took place in Jerusalem. ‘Umar ibn al-Khattab, third Caliph of the Muslim community, conquered the city in 637 and placed it under Muslim rule.²⁰⁰ This historical juncture is debated at length but for the present purpose, three points are essential: First, when ‘Umar entered Jerusalem, he found a garbage dump at the location of what had previously been the Jewish and Roman temples. The location became the site of ‘Abd al-Malik’s construction projects discussed above. Second, Sophronius, the Greek Orthodox patriarch of the Church of the Holy Sepulcher, invited ‘Umar to pray in the Holy Sepulcher shortly after the conquest. ‘Umar refused the invitation but offered to pray a short distance outside the Church instead. His reasoning was that if he prayed in the church, his followers would eventually attempt to transform the church into a mosque, something he did not want.²⁰¹ The final essential point for the present purpose is that ‘Umar and Sophronius signed an agreement that defined the relationship between Muslims and Christians in the city. This agreement came to be known as the Pact of ‘Umar.²⁰² After these seminal events, Jerusalem remained relatively stable Islamic city under Umayyad (650-750) and Abbasid rule (750-969). The city also became an important center of worship and pilgrimage. Adding to the incentive for pilgrimage to Jerusalem, sayings of the Prophet (*Hadith*) claimed that the value of prayer in al-Aqsa Mosque was worth 500-times any other prayer.²⁰³

²⁰⁰ The Arabic term for conquered is *fath*, which can also be translated ‘open.’

²⁰¹ And as he had predicted, Muslims later built a Mosque where he had prayed. That mosque is known today as the Mosque of ‘Umar, honoring both his wisdom and perceptivity for refusing Sophronius’s invitation and praying a short distance from the Church of the Holy Sepulcher.

²⁰² Several versions of the pact exist, and scholars debate the legitimacy and veracity of each. For details, see Maher Y. Abu-Munshar, *Islamic Jerusalem and Its Christians: A History of Tolerance and Tensions* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2013), 63.

²⁰³ The Hadith also indicate that praying in the sacred cities of Mecca and Medina procure greater reward.

The first major disruptions to the (un)disrupted Islamic vision of Jerusalem came on July 15, 1099. Frankish Christian Crusaders conquered the city, and it is generally believed that they killed almost everyone in the city: Muslims, Jews, and non-Latin Christians.²⁰⁴ The Dome of the Rock and al-Aqsa Mosque were converted into Christian places of worship, crucifixes and altars being placed within them. Ibn al-Athir, the Muslim historian, recounts the Crusader occupation this way:

In the Masjid al-Aqsa the Franks slaughtered more than 70,000 people, including a few imams and Islamic scholars, devout and ascetic men, who had abandoned their homeland to live in pious isolation in the holy place. The Franks stripped the Dome of the Rock of more than forty silver candelabras, each weighing 3600 drachmas, and a large silver lamp, weighing 44 Syrian pounds, as well as 150 small silver and more than 20 gold candlesticks, and much more booty.²⁰⁵

Several mosques were turned into Churches, and the *adhan* (call to prayer) was forbidden for the 88-years the Crusaders ruled the city.²⁰⁶ The Crusades left a profound and lasting impact on Jerusalem. As Kenneth Craig put it, "The image of them [The Crusaders] is one that no century since has been able to exorcise."²⁰⁷

The Crusader period ended in 1187 when Saladin, the Kurdish Muslim leader, routed the Crusaders at the battle of Hattin in the Galilee region. He then retook Jerusalem shortly after.²⁰⁸ Tradition reports that Saladin briefly delayed the retaking of Jerusalem to coincide with the annual remembrance of Muhammad's Night Journey.²⁰⁹ After restoring

²⁰⁴ Scholars debate the veracity of the large-scale massacre hypothesis, however, placing the actual numbers much lower. For details, see Konrad Hirschler, "The Jerusalem Conquest of 492/1099 in the Medieval Arabic Historiography of the Crusades: From Regional Plurality to Islamic Narrative," *Crusades* 13(2014).

²⁰⁵ As recorded in Chapman, *Whose Holy City?: Jerusalem and the Future of Peace in the Middle East*, 101.

²⁰⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁰⁷ Kenneth Cragg, *The Arab Christian: A History in the Middle East* (London: Mowbray, 1992), 12.

²⁰⁸ He was Sunni Muslim of Kurdish origin who climbed the ranks of the Fatimid dynasty through successful military conquests. He eventually took control of the dynasty, making it the Ayyubid dynasty, the name Ayyubid being derived from his surname Ayyub.

²⁰⁹ Chapman, *Whose Holy City?: Jerusalem and the Future of Peace in the Middle East*, 101.

Muslim rule to the city, Saladin ordered the removal of the Crusader Christian symbols in the Dome of the Rock and al-Aqsa Mosque. He insisted that the Holy Sepulcher be preserved. It is widely believed also that he commissioned a craftsman from Aleppo to construct of a new *minbar* (raised seat for delivering Friday sermons) for al-Aqsa Mosque.²¹⁰

After he retook the city, Saladin further consolidated Muslim rule in Jerusalem by establishing schools, hospitals, mosques, and pilgrim's hospices, deeding them Islamic endowments (*waqf* / pl. *awqaf*).²¹¹

Daphna Ephrat explains the historical context of founding endowments:

By invoking the law of the *waqf*, the founders...ensured the perpetuity of these establishments and the permanent support of those who were considered representative of the broad mainstream of Islam and who taught, studied, or lodged in them. Housed in glorious buildings in the great cities of Islam, the *madrasas* and *khanqahs* signified the dedication of the rulers to the revitalization of Sunni Islam in the face of enemies within (the Shi'is) and without (the Crusaders)... Endowments of religious establishments must have also helped to establish a bond of shared norms and values between the rulers and the beneficiaries and to generate a public opinion that approved of and even legitimized the rule of the endowing ruler in the territories he had conquered.²¹²

Saladin, thus, fortified his rule through the establishment of *waqf* properties. They legitimated his rule.²¹³ His most significant *waqf* endowment was the *Haram al-Sharif*. The *Haram al-Sharif* (often translated, The Noble Sanctuary) refers to al-Aqsa Mosque, the Dome of the Rock, and the 144 dunum area surrounding them. Today,

²¹⁰ The historical record shows that it was not, in fact, Saladin who ordered the construction of the minbar but his officer Nur al-Din. Saladin was only responsible for having it brought to Jerusalem. 'Imad al-Din al-Isfahani, *al-Fath al-Qussi fi al-Fath al-Qudsi* (Cairo, Egypt: al-Dar al-Qawmiyya li-l-Tiba'a wa-l-Nashr, 1965).

²¹¹ A *waqf* is an administrative deed which establishes a property as a charitable trust that can never be bought or sold because it belongs to God. Endowment deeds define what has been endowed and the rightful succession of custodianship. For details about Islamic Endowments, see Yehoshu'a Frenkel, "Political and Social Aspects of Islamic Religious Endowments (Awqaf): Saladin in Cairo (1169–73) and Jerusalem (1187–93)," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 62, no. 01 (2009); Khalidi, "The Future of Arab Jerusalem," 135; Dumper, *Islam and Israel: Muslim Religious Endowments and the Jewish State*.

²¹² Daphna Ephrat, *Spiritual Wayfarers, Leaders in Piety: Sufis and the Dissemination of Islam in Medieval Palestine* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2008b), 77.

²¹³ Khalidi, "The Future of Arab Jerusalem," 134.

Muslims use the term al-Aqsa Mosque and Haram al-Sharif interchangeably, even though they technically refer to different things.

Jerusalem's Muslims today, unsurprisingly, view Saladin as a heroic and virtuous Islamic leader. James Reston, one of Saladin's biographers, described Saladin's retaking of Jerusalem: "His actions seemed to define what it meant to be a good Muslim. By his amnesties and various charities toward his enemies, he secured forever his reputation for gentility and wisdom."²¹⁴ Muslim perceptions today align with Reston's words: he is widely revered.²¹⁵ His expulsion of the Crusaders and bolstering of the Islamic identity of the city were praiseworthy achievements—and ones that should be emulated today.

Another significant factor in Muslim history in Jerusalem has been the overlap of sacred geography with Jews and Christians. As a result, Muslims in Jerusalem have had ongoing and direct interaction with the other faith communities throughout history. This overlap has led to tension and division but also unity and accommodation. Generally speaking, Muslims in Jerusalem view themselves as accommodating to other religions so long as the city is under Muslim rule. As recently as the nineteenth century, Jerusalem's Muslims had convivial inter-faith relationships, ones that even included participation in the religious rituals of other faith traditions. While such syncretism is hard to imagine today (See Chapter 5), the porous and blurry boundaries of religious rituals pervaded until the British Mandate (1917-1947). Vincent Lemire explains:

The syncretism of the holy sites in Jerusalem is thus not an accidental or secondary fact, but in reality the essential, fundamental given that makes it possible to understand the common world underlying the representations of its residents. To put it more directly, nonspecificity, mixing, and hybridization appear as the original, unique mark of the holy sites of Jerusalem, while designation,

²¹⁴ James Reston, *Warriors of God: Richard the Lionheart and Saladin in the Third Crusade* (New York: Anchor, 2002), 95.

²¹⁵ The general perception of Saladin's tolerant and noble actions in Jerusalem is widespread. Some historians, however, take issue with this, noting, for example, that his decision to preserve the Church of the Holy Sepulcher did not emerge from his own chivalry, but was taken after serious legal debate among his advisors instead. The majority advised that legal precedent obligated him to preserve it. al-Isfahani, *al-Fath al-Qussi fi al-Fath al-Qudsi*, 146.

distinction, and separation are only later processes that historically, appeared rather late.²¹⁶

The mixed, hybrid, and shared religious engagements that had been typical began to dissipate after the British occupied the city. The British military imposed its will, and shared religious rituals were forbidden. While physical divisions of religious communities began as early as the Crusades, the British strengthened and exacerbated these divisions when they imposed the four-quarter system widely known today: Muslim, Christian, Jewish, and Armenian quarters. The British logic was to “preserve an equilibrium between the city’s four ancient communities,” even though no reference to “Christian” or “Jewish” quarters had appeared in the Ottoman registries before the nineteenth century.²¹⁷ Today, the British four-quarter nomenclature is what most people know. Salim Tamari explains the broad-scale transformations deftly:

With the implementation of the terms of the Balfour Declaration during the British Mandate, this era of religious syncretism came to a close. Palestinian nationalism—previously a secular movement—started to become infused with religious fervor. The new colonial authority interpreted the protocols regarding religious control and access in terms of confessional exclusivity. Christians were banned by military edict from entering Islamic holy places, and Muslims were excluded from Christian churches and monasteries. It had been customary for young Jerusalemites of all religions to picnic in the green meadows of the Haram area, but now the area was off-limits.²¹⁸

Historically, inter-faith religious rituals in Jerusalem were the norm—not the exception. While the lines of religious confessional division seem sharply drawn today, the flexible and hybrid multi-faith spirit of the city remains a dormant theme within Jerusalem’s repertoire of history and memory.

While close observers may critique this account of Islam in Jerusalem (citing historical gaps or the glossing of theological

²¹⁶ Vincent Lemire, *Jerusalem 1900: The Holy City in the Age of Possibilities* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2017), 71.

²¹⁷ Khalidi, "The Future of Arab Jerusalem," 138; Salim Tamari, *Mountain against the Sea: Essays on Palestinian Society and Culture* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2009), 82.

²¹⁸ *Mountain against the Sea: Essays on Palestinian Society and Culture* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2009), 85.

controversies) my aim has been to describe how Jerusalemites today draw from their sacred texts and the city's distant and more recent pasts to create a vision of how Islam should be understood and practiced in the city—(un)disrupted. Jerusalem is a sacred Islamic city, and the al-Aqsa Mosque is its sacred core. The source of the Mosque's holiness is neither bricks nor mortar, but the location itself.²¹⁹ Readers will recall from Chapter 1 that rituals have the property of temporal structuring and that they create links between people's perceived pasts, present realities, and projected futures. The perceived coherency of a ritual—rooted in reference to the past—is essential for grasping people's understanding of how rituals should be performed. This is why sacred texts and history are the first and most important motifs in their broader repertoire of themes. I now turn to Palestinian Nationalism.

Palestinian Nationalism and the Logic of Zionism

The 'imagined community' of Palestinian nationalism emerged in the late Ottoman and early British Mandate periods and was linked (chronologically and phenomenologically) to the formation of other regional nationalisms.²²⁰ Multiple forces converged to create a distinct shared solidarity between the indigenous people of historic Palestine.²²¹ In this section, I explain how this shared imaginary was linked to concrete activities (rituals) to expand Palestinian's repertoire of themes. I also explain the logic of Zionism and its influence on the Palestinian

²¹⁹ Khalidi, "The Future of Arab Jerusalem," 136; Ron Hassner confirms the point: "Because sanctity rests in location, as well as in the structure that marks the location as sacred, the physical destruction of sacred structures does not diminish the sanctity or centrality of sacred sites." Found in "'To Halve and to Hold': Conflicts over Sacred Space and the Problem of Indivisibility," 16-17.

²²⁰ For details, see Rashid Khalidi, *Palestinian Identity: The Construction of Modern National Consciousness* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), 19-21. I use the term 'imagined communities' with deliberate reference to Benedict Anderson's work: *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 2006 [1983]).

²²¹ The seminal study exploring this emergence of Palestinian nationalism is Rashid Khalidi's *Palestinian Identity: the Construction of Modern National Consciousness*. For other treatments of Palestinian nationalism, see Migdal, *Palestinian Society and Politics*; Kimmerling and Migdal, *The Palestinian People: A History*; Pappé, *A History of Modern Palestine: One Land, Two Peoples*.

experience. Readers should hear echoes throughout this section of ‘the invention of tradition’ discussed in Chapter 3.

The Palestinian national conscience centered on Jerusalem. As the city of sacred sites, the draw was natural; but the city had also gained importance in the late Ottoman period. Jerusalem experienced many changes as it became an important urban center. To highlight several changes: the Ottomans restructured the city’s administration and made land reforms; the city expanded beyond its historic walls; and Western institutions such as diplomatic missions, monasteries, hospitals, and schools flooded the city.²²² While a detailed discussion of these changes is beyond the scope of the study, three other changes merit specific attention: the changing role of elites, Christian involvement in the national project, and the evolving boundaries of religious identity.

From the era of Ottoman reform until the 1920s, Palestine was “rule[d] by a class of preeminent families whose power derived from their combined position as landlords, faction bosses, brokers between central government and people, and as high religious functionaries.”²²³ But the late Ottoman and early British Mandate periods presented significant challenges to these families.²²⁴ And two leading families, the Nashashibi’s and al-Husseini’s, began to see their prestige and status erode. So as to maintain their influence, they adapted. Hajj Amin was the patriarch of the al-Husseini clan, and he placed his family at the center of the burgeoning Palestinian nationalist movement. He became Grand Mufti of Jerusalem in 1921 and channeled his religious authority to consolidate political power.²²⁵ He used the symbolic power of Jerusalem’s sacred status in Islam to unify disparate groups of local

²²² Pullan et al., *The Struggle for Jerusalem's Holy Places*, 12-14. For detailed analyses of the transformations in Jerusalem during the late Ottoman and British Mandate periods, see: Khalidi, *Palestinian Identity: The Construction of Modern National Consciousness*, Chapter 2; Kimmerling and Migdal, *The Palestinian People: A History*, Chapter 3; Tamari, *Mountain against the Sea: Essays on Palestinian Society and Culture*, Chapter 1.

²²³ Johnson, *Islam and the Politics of Meaning in Palestinian Nationalism*, 98.

²²⁴ Khalidi, *Palestinian Identity: The Construction of Modern National Consciousness*, Chapters 3 and 4.

²²⁵ A *mufti* is an Islamic scholar who publishes religious opinions on the basis of Sharia law. They are seen as figures of religious authority and prestige.

Palestinians and mobilize support throughout the Muslim world.²²⁶ By building into the Palestinian repertoire of symbols and rituals, al-Husseini became instrumental in consolidating the Palestinian national conscience.

Al-Husseini worked to develop the Palestinian national conscience through several initiatives; First, he and other *'ulama* (religious scholars) in Palestine issued a *fatwa* (religious ruling) forbidding the sale of land to Jews. The act began to clarify the boundaries between Jewish and Palestinian communities.²²⁷ Second, he initiated a massive restoration project at the Haram al-Sharif. Friedland and Hecht explain:

After the first state of the major repair work on the mosques of *al-Haram al-Sharif* was completed in 1928, they [the mosques] became within a year symbols of the struggle against Zionism in Palestine. This was the best way to bring home the danger threatening the Palestinians Arabs from Zionism. Instead of abstract nationalist slogans about self-determination, majority rights, etc., they now had a concrete symbol which was clearly understood by the Muslim masses.²²⁸

Al-Husseini had been arguing that the Zionists were aiming to destroy the Haram al-Sharif and these repairs, thus, symbolically countered the Zionist encroachment. Third, al-Husseini repurposed religious rituals to fit the nationalist framework. In this period, it is important to note that Palestinian nationalism included Christians (Jerusalem was, after all, the location of the Holy Sepulchre). "The Christians," Baruch Kimmerling points out, "were one of the most active elements in the national reawakening and the Arab-Palestinian national crystallization."²²⁹ And that al-Husseini, "knew that too heavy an accentuation of Islam and Islamic symbols would alienate the very important Arab Christian

²²⁶ Eickelman and Piscatori, *Muslim Politics*, 146; Cohen, *The Rise and Fall of Arab Jerusalem: Politics and the City since 1967*, 1.

²²⁷ Roy, *Hamas and Civil Society in Gaza: Engaging the Islamist Social Sector*, 274n29.

²²⁸ Initially found in Friedland and Hecht, "The Pilgrimage to Nebi Musa and the Origins of Palestinian Nationalism," 91. Friedland and Hecht are quoting Yehoshua Porath, *The Emergence of the Palestinian-Arab National Movement 1918-1929* (London: Frank Cass, 1974).

²²⁹ Baruch Kimmerling, *Clash of Identities: Explorations in Israeli and Palestinian Societies* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008), 12.

population from the national movement.”²³⁰ Al-Husseini, therefore, sought to strike a balance between religion and nationalism, unifying the Muslim and Christian communities against their common enemy, the Zionists. Toward this end, the annual *Nabi Musa* processional became the ideal concrete ritual-symbol to manipulate.²³¹

The Nabi Musa *Maqam* (mausoleum) is located close to the Dead Sea, several miles outside of Jericho on the southern side of the road that connects Jerusalem and Jericho. Saladin had endowed it an Islamic *waqf* and then established an annual processional to it. Eight days preceding Eastern Orthodox Easter, pilgrims would assemble in Jerusalem on the Haram al-Sharif and process to the sacred site, returning to Jerusalem on Maundy Thursday.²³² Saladin had designed the pilgrimage to preempt Crusaders from using the holiday as a guise for military attack on the city.²³³ And since they had been nominated custodians of the Islamic endowments in Jerusalem in the late eighteenth century, the al-Husseini clan became patrons of the annual *Nabi Musa* processional. According to Friedland and Hecht, the al-Husseini clan used it, “...as an instrument to unify the nation, to assert their leadership, and to defeat what they saw to be new crusaders, the British and the Zionists. The Nabi Musa pilgrimage was a natural device for political mobilization against the British and the Zionists.”²³⁴ Tawfiq Canaan, the Palestinian ethnographer from the period, wrote a detailed account of the ritual.²³⁵ He described the initial assemblies at the

²³⁰ *Clash of Identities: Explorations in Israeli and Palestinian Societies* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008), 80.

²³¹ The annual festival of Nabi Rubin in Jaffa was formative in this period for similar reasons. For details, see Tamari, *Mountain against the Sea: Essays on Palestinian Society and Culture*, 27-31; Mahmoud Yazbak, "The Muslim Festival of Nabi Rubin in Palestine: From Religious Festival to Summer Resort," *Holy Land Studies* 10, no. 2 (2011).

²³² Ifrah Zilberman, "The Renewal of the Pilgrimage to Nabi Musa," in *Sacred Space in Israel and Palestine: Religion and Politics* ed. Marshall J. Breger, Yitzhak Reiter, and Leonard M. Hammer (London: Routledge, 2012).

²³³ Tamari, *Mountain against the Sea: Essays on Palestinian Society and Culture*, 27.

²³⁴ Friedland and Hecht, "The Pilgrimage to Nebi Musa and the Origins of Palestinian Nationalism," 109.

²³⁵ Canaan, *Mohammedan Saints and Sanctuaries in Palestine*, 193-218.

Haram al-Sharif, procession to the *maqam*, rituals at the sacred site, and the return to Jerusalem. Friedland and Hecht, in their synthesized reconstruction of Canaan's description, point out a detail which aptly demonstrates the nationalization of the processional:

Canaan describes the banner [presented to the Mufti] as made of green velvet cloth (200x140cm), embroidered along the border in gold thread with a piece of black silk bearing inscriptions at its center. By the early 1930's, the iconography of the Nabi Musa banner had changed. Photographs from that period indicate that the banner was much like the contemporary Palestinian flag, different only in its having an embroidered Dome of the Rock in its very enter.²³⁶

The banner's change paints a vivid picture—The Dome of the Rock was woven into the flag of Palestinian Nationalism. Religion and nationalism were being stitched together through celebratory processional. Salim Tamari explains that the repurposing went so far that “Some [celebrations], like the Nabi Musa processions, were religious occasions that became almost exclusively nationalist in character.”²³⁷ Al-Husseini, thus, drew on the memory of Saladin's heroic valor and deployed his religious authority to transform the ritual as a Palestinian national symbol. He expanded the Palestinian repertoire of themes concerning religion and nationalism.

With time, however, al-Husseini's religious-ritual-turned-national-symbol began to face challenges. First, Palestinian Christians who participated initially grew uncomfortable with its increased Islamic emphasis.²³⁸ Second, al-Husseini's political rivals, the Nashashibi's, challenged his leadership, and the two clans got entangled in a power-struggle with alternative visions for dealing with the Zionists.²³⁹ Third, the processional took a major hit when the British forced al-Husseini to flee Jerusalem. And, finally, World War II drained the processional of all momentum. For lack of food and supplies, few people participated at

²³⁶ Friedland and Hecht, "The Pilgrimage to Nebi Musa and the Origins of Palestinian Nationalism," 100.

²³⁷ Tamari, *Mountain against the Sea: Essays on Palestinian Society and Culture*, 177.

²³⁸ Friedland and Hecht, "The Pilgrimage to Nebi Musa and the Origins of Palestinian Nationalism," 94, 110.

²³⁹ "The Pilgrimage to Nebi Musa and the Origins of Palestinian Nationalism," 104-05.

this time. The processional was canceled outright on account of the 1948 war. When the Jordanians took control of the city after the war, they deliberately suppressed the pilgrimage since the al-Husseini's and Hashemites were political rivals. And after they took the city in 1967, the Israelis also refused to allow the processional to be revived. While the *Nabi Musa* processional ultimately perished, the ritual's legacy remained important as a ritual expression of Palestinian nationalism, particularly in its formational period.

I have, thus far, observed how nationalism entered the Palestinian consciousness and expanded the repertoire of religious themes. Al-Husseini had encouraged real-life participation in the project through real activities; through restoration projects on the Haram al-Sharif, prohibiting land-sales to Jews, and adopting in the annual national-religious processional to *Nabi Musa*. These examples illustrate how people became invested in the abstract notion of nationalism. Rituals made practical links between what people did and believed. But at this point, Palestinian nationalism was only half the story.

Since its inception, Zionism has been a determinative force for Palestinians. Defined concisely, Zionism is the political project seeking an ethnically defined nation-state for the Jewish people in historic Palestine.²⁴⁰ The project is similar to Palestinian nationalism in that it unifies an otherwise sundry group of people around shared rituals and imagined themes.²⁴¹ While Zionism is plainly an invented tradition, my purpose here is not to give its rebuttal or defense, but to highlight how the political ideology has influenced Palestinians. Zionism, in a sentence, has been profoundly disruptive—the primary impetus for the disruption of Muslim religious rituals. Here, I outline the background and logic of the ideology.

Jews began migrating to Palestine in the late 1800s. Zionism's visionaries were secular European Jews who wanted an independent and autonomous homeland for the Jewish people. And to cultivate

²⁴⁰ While Zionism is not a monolith, my concern is with how it has worked to create investment and buy-in for the creation of a Jewish State.

²⁴¹ For a detailed study, see: Masalha, *The Bible and Zionism: Invented Traditions, Archaeology and Post-Colonialism in Israel-Palestine*.

support for their political vision, early ideologues framed Zionism in religious terms to court the backing of religious leaders.²⁴²

Several locations were considered, but the Zionists chose, ultimately, to focus their efforts on Palestine. Zionism, at this early stage, was about creating a new society through agriculture and infrastructure, economics and politics, civil society and communal life in historic Palestine.

One way early Zionists began justifying their political vision was by unearthing—literally—the historical links between the land and its newly arrived immigrants. Since the Hebrew Bible was filled with physical and geographical references to the ancient Jewish homeland, it became their archeological treasure map.²⁴³ Novices and experts alike sifted through the layers of sediment and strata, looking for links. Archeology became an obsession. Tragically for the Palestinians, however, artifacts that did not validate (or challenged) the readymade Biblical template were deemed irrelevant and discarded. Centuries of history before and after the Biblical periods were, thus, silenced by the rubbish heap—centuries of history that held the remains of the land’s Islamic past.²⁴⁴ Zionism had an acute case of historical amnesia that validated itself and dismissed the claims of others. This was one mechanism Zionists used to eliminate Palestinians.

Settler-colonialism has had a two-track dynamic from the beginning: on the one hand, it was about the creation of an independent and autonomous homeland for Jewish people. On the other, it was about the elimination of the land’s previous inhabitants. This is the logic of Israel’s settler-colonialism—creation and elimination. In his landmark

²⁴² Masalha and others have pointed out that early Zionists were secular, not religious. See, *Ibid.*

²⁴³ Western Christians also played an important role in the deployment and inculcation of the archaeological imagination of the Jewish State. Jews dug for the Old Testament; Christians dug for that and the New Testament, too. See, *The Bible and Zionism: Invented Traditions, Archaeology and Post-Colonialism in Israel-Palestine*, 102-05.

²⁴⁴ The groundbreaking study bringing these historical and theoretical presupposition to light is Nadia Abu El-Haj, *Facts on the Ground: Archaeological Practice and Territorial Self-Fashioning in Israeli Society* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2001).

study '*Settler Colonialism and the elimination of the Native*,' Patrick Wolfe explains:

Settler colonialism destroys to replace. As Theodor Herzl, founding father of Zionism, observed in his allegorical manifesto/novel, "If I wish to substitute a new building for an old one, I must demolish before I construct." In a kind of realization that took place half a century later, one-time deputy-mayor of West Jerusalem Meron Benvenisti recalled, "As a member of a pioneering youth movement, I myself 'made the desert bloom' by uprooting the ancient olive trees of al-Bassa [a Palestinian village] to clear the ground for a banana grove, as required by the 'planned farming' principles of my kibbutz, Rosh Haniqra."²⁴⁵

The quote colorfully illustrates the settler-colonial logic that the indigenous Palestinians would have to be eliminated so they could be replaced. Wolfe's words also show how colonizers deploy metaphors (in this case, a building) and myths ('making the desert bloom') to rationalize the project. Zionists have often appealed to Mark Twain's portrayal of Palestine in his travel book, *The Innocents Abroad*, as grounds for their mythical metaphor: "Palestine sits in sackcloth and ashes. Over it broods the spell of a curse that has withered its fields and fettered its energies. Palestine is desolate and unlovely..."²⁴⁶ Palestine, according to this narrative, was an undeveloped, unimportant backwater of the Ottoman empire at the turn of the 20th century.²⁴⁷ When someone heard this myth, calling historical Palestine "A land without a people for a people without a land," became an easy thing to do.²⁴⁸ Thus, settler-colonialism justified its vision.²⁴⁹ This is the logic of

²⁴⁵ Wolfe, "Settler Colonialism and the Elimination of the Native," 388.

²⁴⁶ Mark Twain, *The Innocents Abroad* (London: Wordsworth Editions Ltd, 2010 [1869]), Chapter 56.

²⁴⁷ The most substantive, articulate, and persuasive rebuttal to this insidious myth is Rashid Khalidi's *Palestinian Identity: The Construction of Modern National Consciousness*.

²⁴⁸ The trope 'A land without a people for a people without a land' was actually coined by a Christian Restorationist who supported the establishment of a Jewish homeland in Palestine. See, Adam Garfinkle, *Jewcentricity: Why the Jews Are Praised, Blamed, and Used to Explain Just About Everything* (New York: John Wiley and Sons, 2009), 265.

²⁴⁹ Later, Zionism would also be justified by the horrific events of the Holocaust. But this was a global catastrophe that only involved Palestinians tangentially. Why should Palestinians lose their land as retribution for Hitler's sin? They asked me often.

elimination. One straightforward point cuts through the myth, however. If Palestinians never existed, there would be no conflict today. Their mere presence exposes the fallacy of the myth.

Israel's settler-colonial project was, thus, both exclusive and exclusionary; exclusive in that Jews were Zionism's only welcome participants, and exclusionary in that Palestinians stood in the way of its realization. These phenomena are central elements in the Palestinian repertoire of themes today. In the study quoted above, Wolfe goes on to argue that settler-colonialism is "a structure not an event."²⁵⁰ While I agree with Wolfe's assertion conceptually, I must also point out that structures of disruption intrinsically take shape through specific events. I, therefore, move from a conceptual evaluation of Zionism to a practical discussion of the disruptive events that have shaped Palestinian lives because they, too, inflect the Palestinian repertoire of themes.

The Wars of Disruption: 1948 and 1967

The creation-elimination logic of Zionism's settler-colonial project was on stark display in 1948. The Zionists, having warred and won against Arabs and Palestinians, declared themselves a sovereign State. A *de facto* line—the 'Green Line'—was drawn between Israel and its neighboring Arab States when hostilities officially ended in 1949. Then, as Dan Rabinowitz and Khaled Furani observed; "The narrative of Israel as a place offering physical haven, identity, and solidarity to endangered refugees from Europe and beyond completely overshadowed the moral and material injuries of Palestinians in the aftermath of 1948."²⁵¹ The logic of elimination was more than historical amnesia, physical destruction, and reconstruction; it was a way of silencing the plight of the Palestinian. After approximately thirty years of silence, however, two streams of academic inquiry began taking Palestinian voices seriously, ethnographers (See Chapter 3) and Israel's so called New Historians.²⁵²

²⁵⁰ Wolfe, "Settler Colonialism and the Elimination of the Native," 388.

²⁵¹ Furani and Rabinowitz, "The Ethnographic Arriving of Palestine," 480.

²⁵² For a detailed discussion of the New Historians, see Anita Shapira and Ora Wiskind-Elper, "Politics and Collective Memory: The Debate over the "New Historians" in Israel," *History and Memory* 7, no. 1 (1995).

Together, the two groups articulated the genealogies of disruption and loss originating in the 1948 War.

The 1948 War sparked massive social upheaval for Palestinians. As a result, they began to call it *al-Naqba*, the catastrophe. Israel ethnically cleansed some 700,000 Palestinians from their homes and lands, and the deleterious effect cannot be overstated.²⁵³ The exodus was a “decisive factor in the collapse of the social fabric of Palestinian society and the mass desertion of towns and villages by their inhabitants.”²⁵⁴ There was a massive collapse of Palestinian political will; elites fled in droves and Palestinians lacked an extra-governmental body to provide basic services or to coordinate resistance. This was also the birth of the refugee crisis. The 1948 catastrophe was a profoundly disruptive event that still lives vividly in the memories of Palestinians.

Jerusalem, the city, suffered intensely in the war, too. While Arabs did maintain control of the Old City and expelled its Jewish residents (about 2,000), Israel cleansed virtually all indigenous Palestinians from the Western side of the city (about 30,000).²⁵⁵ That September, within three months of the war’s end, Palestinians declared Jerusalem their capital (preceding Israelis by more than a year).²⁵⁶ But the declaration had no effect after Jordan annexed the city.²⁵⁷ King Abdullah I focused his political efforts in Amman, recruiting prominent Palestinian figures to his administration, removing Hajj Amin al-Husseini from his position as Grand Mufti of Jerusalem, and banning him from the city. While King Abdullah is said to have considered making Jerusalem

²⁵³ Ilan Pappé, *The Ethnic Cleansing of Palestine* (Oxford: Oneworld, 2006); Walid Khalidi, *All That Remains: The Palestinian Villages Occupied and Depopulated by Israel in 1948* (Washington D.C.: The Institute for Palestine Studies, 2006).

²⁵⁴ Tamari, *Mountain against the Sea: Essays on Palestinian Society and Culture*, 11.

²⁵⁵ Khalidi, "The Future of Arab Jerusalem," 136.

²⁵⁶ Cohen, *The Rise and Fall of Arab Jerusalem: Politics and the City since 1967*, 4.

²⁵⁷ The United Nations also worked to make special provisions for the sacred city in an initiative known as the *Corpus Separatum* (Latin, ‘separate body’). The plan included provisions for the city’s administration and the installment of United Nation peacekeeping forces. The plan was never implemented.

Jordan's second capital, his assassination spoiled any such plans before taking shape.²⁵⁸

After the 1948 war, the Six-Day's War of 1967 was the next major event of Zionist expansion and Palestinian elimination. In a decisive military victory, Israel occupied the Egyptian Sinai, Syria's Golan Heights, Jordan's West Bank, and East Jerusalem. Palestinians came to call this episode *al-Naqsa*, the loss. When the Israeli military occupied Jerusalem's Old City, an Israeli flag was flown above the Dome of the Rock and the Zionists were euphoric.²⁵⁹ For the first time in almost two-millennia, they had political sovereignty over the Temple Mount, the physical foundation, and centerpiece of their faith. Shlomo Goren, then Rabbi and military general, said shortly after the takeover; "Now is the time to put 100kg of explosives into the Mosque of Omar [the Dome of the Rock] so we may rid ourselves of it once and for all."²⁶⁰ Shockwaves, understandably, rippled through the Islamic world. Muslims were deeply traumatized.²⁶¹ Sovereignty over their cherished and sacred mosque was lost. Israel would now determine who and under what circumstances any Muslim would enter. The cohesive links between Muslim religious discourses and practices in and around their sacred space were profoundly disrupted. The implications would be far-reaching.

This episode and other Palestinian losses in the war caused dramatic destabilization of Palestinian society. Loren Lybarger explains that, "Destabilizing events create generations," and that in the 1967 war,

²⁵⁸ In no irony of history, he was assassinated on July 20, 1951 shortly after Friday prayers in Jerusalem at the Haram al-Sharif. His killer was a member of the al-Husseini clan. For further information on this period in Jerusalem history and the role of religion in shaping national consciousness, see Kimberly Katz, *Jordanian Jerusalem: Holy Places and National Spaces* (Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida, 2005).

²⁵⁹ Moshe Dayon, *The Story of My Life* (London: Sphere, 1978), 390.

²⁶⁰ Masalha, *The Bible and Zionism: Invented Traditions, Archaeology and Post-Colonialism in Israel-Palestine*, 79. Masalha gives references for Jewish sources verifying the report, the *Haaretz* newspaper and Israeli army radio.

²⁶¹ Reiter, *Jerusalem and Its Role in Islamic Solidarity*, 70; Cohen, *The Rise and Fall of Arab Jerusalem: Politics and the City since 1967*; Friedland and Hecht, *To Rule Jerusalem*, 355-58.

a new generation of Palestinians was created.²⁶² The war's upheaval made room for a new, university-educated leadership to emerge. These leaders came from refugee camps outside Palestine, primarily, and were from non-landowning mercantile families.²⁶³ Yasser Arafat, head of the non-state military group *Fatah* (the Palestinian National Liberation Movement), was the leader of his class. His cadre won a majority in the Palestinian National Council in 1969 and elected him chairman of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO). Lybarger explains how the new leadership coalesced around a new iteration of Palestinian identity:

Fatah... articulated a form of nationalist consciousness that coincided with the ethos of the lower-middle classes...They adopted stylized forms of peasant costume ('Arafat's kufiyya scarf, e.g.); invoked the ties of family and religion, Muslim and Christian, as the foundation of national solidarity; and apotheosized the peasant-as-heroic-guerrilla who rose up to avenge and reclaim the land... The P.L.O.'s fusion of these different and divergent symbols and discourses into a more or less coherent Palestinian served ideologically to integrate the diverse constituencies—shop owners, town dwellers, villagers, university students, and the new professionals—that comprised the Palestinian refugee population after the Nakba (Disaster) of 1948.²⁶⁴

Palestinians were, therefore, assimilated into the political structures of the PLO. Lybarger terms this consolidation, the 'secular-nationalist milieu.'²⁶⁵ In the wake of the 1948 and 1967 wars, therefore, the Palestinian identity was modified and re-articulated. And resistance to the Zionists was elevated to a prominent position within Palestinian national solidarity broader repertoire of themes.

Improvised Liberation: The *Intifadas*, Oslo, and Hamas

Since 1967, Jerusalem's eastern sector and Old City have been under occupation. Jerusalemites who live in these areas have been

²⁶² Lybarger, *Identity and Religion in Palestine: The Struggle between Islamism and Secularism in the Occupied Territories*, 17.

²⁶³ *Identity and Religion in Palestine: The Struggle between Islamism and Secularism in the Occupied Territories*, 22.

²⁶⁴ *Identity and Religion in Palestine: The Struggle between Islamism and Secularism in the Occupied Territories*, 22-23.

²⁶⁵ This cohort also included the displaced landowners and their descendants. They were medical doctors, teachers, and writers, members of the professional class. Many were Christians. *Identity and Religion in Palestine: The Struggle between Islamism and Secularism in the Occupied Territories*, 23.

subject to the forces of disruption for 50-years, and they have longed for liberation. But as I have noted, while disruptions are deeply problematic, they also create affordances for improvisation. In this section, I examine how Palestinians have engaged in various improvised projects of political emancipation. This material links to the broader thesis because the activities of political emancipation often take on ritual forms: Jerusalemites draw from these themes when performing religious rituals. I examine the First and Second *Intifadas*, the internecine Oslo Accords, and the rise of the Islamic Resistance Movement (Hamas), highlighting how each was improvisational and combined various elements from the broader repertoire of Palestinian themes. Each has had a lasting influence on how Muslims in Jerusalem understand, articulate, and perform religious rituals today.

The First *Intifada* (1987-1993) was a nonviolent, popular uprising aimed at shaking off the Israeli occupation (*intifada*, in Arabic, means ‘to be shaken off, be dusted off’²⁶⁶). Palestinians resisted Israeli occupation through popular protests and stone throwing. They staged acts of civil disobedience such as boycotting Israeli taxes, refusing to work for Israeli employers, and blocking Israeli roads.²⁶⁷ Palestinian youth were especially influential in the uprising. While the concept of *sumud* (steadfastness or resilience) had emerged in Palestine shortly after the 1967 war, it gained broad traction during this period and became a dominant theme in the repertoire of resistance. Scholars have analyzed the concept in various ways—(as a form of everyday

²⁶⁶ Hans Wehr, "Intifada," in *The Hans Wehr Dictionary of Modern Written Arabic* (Ithica, New York: Spoken Language Services, Inc., 1994a).

²⁶⁷ For a detailed treatment of Palestinian strategies of nonviolent resistance, see Mubarak Awad, "Non-Violent Resistance: A Strategy for the Occupied Territories," *Journal of Palestine Studies* 13, no. 4 (1984); Mary E. King, *A Quiet Revolution: The First Palestinian Intifada and Nonviolent Resistance* (New York: Nation Books, 2007).

resistance,²⁶⁸ passive resistance,²⁶⁹ infrapolitics,²⁷⁰ or, more recently, as resilient resistance²⁷¹)—but it was fundamentally about expressing Palestinian’s will to resist and their resolve to remain in the land. Palestinians improvised politically with nonviolent tactics and rearticulated solidarities.

The Islamic Resistance Movement (known popularly as Hamas) was established more-or-less concurrently with the outbreak of the First *Intifada*. While it understood itself as a wing of Egypt’s Muslim Brotherhood, Hamas adapted its political and theological positions for the Palestinian context. Hamas put legs to its vision through deliberate social development and armed resistance to Israel. They built schools, hospitals, and civil institutions which fostered trust among its constituents.²⁷² The movement’s military wing focused on armed confrontation with Israel, and the resistance gained popularity because Palestinians had come to loathe the occupation. Hamas also gave Palestinians a discursively emphatic view of Islam that accomplished two things: it validated armed resistance against Israel and challenged the secular-nationalist political camp. Loren Lybarger, who I quoted above, also succinctly articulated why the ‘Islamist milieu’ gained influence:

Like the Fathawi [secular-nationalist] milieu, the Islamist sphere achieves this integration by harnessing the symbols and narratives of religion (*al-din*, i.e. Islam) and the Fallahi ‘customs and traditions’ (*al-‘adat wa al-taqalid*) to the image of the up-to-date revolutionary. But whereas Fatawism tends to secularize the religions (Islam and Christianity) and traditions by integrating them into a multi-confessional conception of a territorially bounded nation-

²⁶⁸ Wendy Pearlman, *Violence, Nonviolence, and the Palestinian National Movement* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011).

²⁶⁹ Rashmi Singh, "The Discourse and Practice of ‘Heroic Resistance’ in the Israeli–Palestinian Conflict: The Case of Hamas," *Politics, Religion & Ideology* 13, no. 4 (2012).

²⁷⁰ Sophie Richter-Devroe, "Palestinian Women's Everyday Resistance: Between Normality and Normalisation," *Journal of International Women's Studies* 12, no. 2 (2011).

²⁷¹ Caitlin Ryan, "Everyday Resilience as Resistance: Palestinian Women Practicing Sumud," *International Political Sociology* 9, no. 4 (2015).

²⁷² For details, see: Roy, *Hamas and Civil Society in Gaza: Engaging the Islamist Social Sector*.

state, the Islamists draw on Islamic religious discourse and symbols to reframe the national purpose as a religious effort (*jihad*) to achieve a 'Muslim Palestine'—an entity grounded in the traditions of the past and, most critically, the customary practices stipulated in the shari'a (Islamic customary law).²⁷³

Hamas' mobilization through use of religious symbols and discourse is critical to the current study. The movement emphasized personal piety: women wearing *hijabs*,²⁷⁴ closing movie theaters, performing daily prayers, and so forth. Salim Tamari argues that the Islamic worldview gained traction among Palestinians for both political and behavioral reasons: "Politically, the nationalist and leftist movements failed to provide practical solutions to the daily misery of occupation."²⁷⁵ And behaviorally, they were incapable of helping people cope with the transition from a traditional rural society that exerted high levels of social control to the new more complex and fragmented urban landscape. He goes on, "It was this failure of traditionalism and of the agencies of change to grasp the nature of the period that created fertile ground for the emergence of the Islamic solution."²⁷⁶ In addition to Salim's analysis, I would add that the change also paralleled the global pietistic shift, and that Hamas' tactic of encouraging pious activity and rituals allowed people to feel physically connected to the vision (See Chapter 1).²⁷⁷ These are the reasons the 'Islamic solution' became an important discursive theme for Palestinians and could be understood as improvisational. But I must also note that Hamas—in its stressed repetition and blaring emphasis on Islam and resistance—has never been able to harmonize all Palestinian Muslims. There were and are many Palestinian dissenters to Hamas' vision; some out of

²⁷³ Lybarger, *Identity and Religion in Palestine: The Struggle between Islamism and Secularism in the Occupied Territories*, 73.

²⁷⁴ Rema Hammami, "Women, the Hijab and the Intifada," *Middle East Report* 164/165(1990).

²⁷⁵ *Mountain against the Sea: Essays on Palestinian Society and Culture*, 55.

²⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁷⁷ Gorski and Altinordu, "After Secularization?"; Antoun and Hegland, *Religious Resurgence: Contemporary Cases in Islam, Christianity, and Judaism*.

disagreement with Hamas' vision; others due to competing family loyalties and tribal alliances.

Another important political development, influencing Muslim religious rituals in Jerusalem, was the Oslo Accords. The Oslo Accords, starting in September 1993, were a series of peace negotiations between representatives of the Israeli government and the PLO, and they added peace to the growing repertoire of Palestinian themes. After several years of nonviolent resistance during the First *Intifada*, grassroots efforts to make peace grew in popularity.²⁷⁸ Political leaders began to pay attention as momentum for these person-to-person initiatives grew. Setting aside a detailed account of the political-ping-pong, Israeli and Palestinian politicians started holding peace negotiations that culminated in the Oslo Agreements.²⁷⁹ Israel recognized the PLO as the legitimate representative of the Palestinian people, and would no longer consider the group a terrorist organization. Administration of the West Bank and Gaza Strip would be given to Palestinians under the auspices of the Palestinians Authority (PA), in exchange for their official recognition of the State of Israel. People-to-people grassroots initiatives were institutionalized and received tremendous financial support in the 1995 Oslo II agreements (between 20-25 million dollars).²⁸⁰ While these developments caused real changes to the political playing-field, the Oslo accords were really about both parties agreeing that they would—one-day—agree. A five-year timeframe was established to tackle the more sensitive issues—borders, security, settlements, refugees, and Jerusalem—but after this time

²⁷⁸ Dan Rabinowitz, "Natives with Jackets and Degrees. Othering, Objectification and the Role of Palestinians in the Co-Existence Field in Israel," *Social Anthropology* 9, no. 1 (2001).

²⁷⁹ For in-depth studies, see: Nathan J. Brown, *Palestinian Politics after the Oslo Accords: Resuming Arab Palestine* (Berkeley CA: University of California Press, 2003); Nigel Parsons, *The Politics of the Palestinian Authority: From Oslo to Al-Aqsa* (New York: Routledge, 2005); Geoffrey R. Watson, *The Oslo Accords: International Law and the Israeli-Palestinian Peace Agreements* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).

²⁸⁰ Sophie Richter-Devroe, "Gender and Conflict Transformation in Palestine: Women's Political Activism between Local and International Agendas" (Phd diss., Exeter University, 2010), 118. Several examines of these peace initiative are as follows: *Seeds of Peace, Peace Now, Crossing Borders, Holy Land Trust, Just Vision, Musalaha, Palestine Centre for Conflict Resolution and Reconciliation, Parents Circle, Coalition of Women for a Just Peace.*

passed, little progress was made. The Oslo Accords were a failure.²⁸¹ But they had a lasting impact, particularly in Jerusalem.

By its deferment in the Oslo Accords, Jerusalem was a major Palestinian concession. Shlay and Rosen argue that it was one of the Palestinian's "greatest tragedies and mistakes."²⁸² The city became a separate political issue with different rules than other Palestinian territories—and the effect was crushing. The PA was forbidden in East Jerusalem; all Palestinians political activity in the city was suppressed;²⁸³ the Orient House was closed;²⁸⁴ economic institutions were closed (and West Bank residents stopped investments on account of the grim economic prospects), and Israel continued to build and expand settlements.²⁸⁵ The Oslo Agreement had tacitly given Israel complete control over East Jerusalem. After that, Jerusalem was spatially, economically, socially, and politically isolated from the rest of Palestine. While Jerusalemites were marginalized from their fellow Palestinians and by Israeli society, one outcome was that the Jerusalemite identity was strengthened and affirmed, a topic I return to shortly.

Beyond their function as another iteration of disruption and the systematic dispossession of Palestinians from Jerusalem, the Oslo Accords are important because they re-emphasized peace in the repertoire of Palestinian themes. Palestinians were improvising with their political agency when they met with Israelis, promoting cooperation, and looking for ways to make peace. During the Oslo

²⁸¹ Ian Lustick, and others, have argued that right-wing Israeli and American Jewish groups deliberately undermined the Accords from their inception and that they were never intended to succeed. Ian Lustick, "The Oslo Agreement as an Obstacle to Peace," *Journal of Palestine Studies* 27, no. 1 (1997b).

²⁸² Anne B. Shlay and Gillad Rosen, *Jerusalem: The Spatial Politics of a Divided Metropolis* (Maden, MA: Polity, 2015), 14.

²⁸³ The exception was Jerusalemite ability to vote in municipal elections, which they rejected on principle.

²⁸⁴ For details on the Orient house, see *Jerusalem: The Spatial Politics of a Divided Metropolis* (Maden, MA: Polity, 2015), 152.

²⁸⁵ The Har Homa settlement was particularly contentious for its location on land earmarked for Palestinian expansion and its disruption of land continuity between East Jerusalem and other Palestinian territories. *Jerusalem: The Spatial Politics of a Divided Metropolis*, 69-72.

Period, it became plausible that grassroots initiatives could foster political transformation. After several years of failed negotiations, however, Ariel Sharon (and six fellow parliament members of the right-wing Likud party) entered the Haram al-Sharif on September 28, 2000, accompanied by more than a thousand security officers.²⁸⁶ The act was flagrantly provocative and drew on religion's most malefic tendencies. Protests broke out, and the theme of peace dissipated instantly. The uprising came to be known as the Second *Intifada*, or the al-Aqsa *Intifada*. After analyzing each side's accusation of the other's fault in sparking the uprising, Elazar Barkan explains:

Either way, the political conflagration resulted from inciting political extremism that was grounded in strong religious sentiments. There is clear evidence that the Palestinians prepared to demonstrate against Sharon as part of the battle over Jerusalem and its religious significance, which was at the heart of the peace process. They were prepared to use some violence. The question remained the extent..."²⁸⁷

While the First and Second *Intifadas* had similar objectives, Palestinians began actively improvising with violence.²⁸⁸ And here, the influence of Hamas returns. Palestinians started using suicide bombers, for one. This fear-evoking tactic caused Israel to respond with more oppressive measures and ultimately gave Israel the justification it needed to construct of The Wall (See following). I cannot overstate the significance of Ariel Sharon's entry to the Haram al-Sharif: his transgression of the site's Status Quo fueled Palestinian fears that the compound had become increasingly important to Israelis (See Chapter 7). The Israeli disruption threatened the core motif of the Muslim

²⁸⁶ Elazar Barkan, "Choreographing Upheaval: The Politics of Sacred Sites in the West Bank," in *Choreographies of Shared Sacred Sites: Religion, Politics, and Conflict Resolution*, ed. Elazar Barkan and Karen Barkey (New York: Columbia University Press, 2015), 243.

²⁸⁷ "Choreographing Upheaval: The Politics of Sacred Sites in the West Bank," in *Choreographies of Shared Sacred Sites: Religion, Politics, and Conflict Resolution*, ed. Elazar Barkan and Karen Barkey (New York: Columbia University Press, 2015), 243-44.

²⁸⁸ By framing Palestinian use of violence this way, I do not mean to imply that this was the first time they had acted violently against Israelis. My purpose is to illustrate how violence was linked to Islam more emphatically.

religious repertoire of themes in Jerusalem—attachment to their sacred mosque.

Toward concluding, Sophie Richter-Devroe's remarks aptly summarize the dynamics operating throughout this section. While she focuses specifically on women, her insights apply to men and women throughout Palestinian society:

In the Palestinian context where everyday life is dominated by material dispossession, by political violence, and omnipresent Israeli control, "[t]he unexpected is [...] never entirely a surprise and the expected is always partly surprising" (Kelly, 2008: 353). In such a situation the distinction between ordinary and extraordinary has little analytical purchase. With their lives being dominated by uncertainty, subjected to multiple sovereignties, and no defined structures to claim their rights, Palestinian women seize any opportunity to ease their suffering and/or to make political claims. Their political agency thus tends to be improvised and full of contradictions.²⁸⁹

In this section, I have explained the background for Palestinian political improvisations. While Richter-Devroe tends to view these elements as contradictory, I argue that they are better understood as drawing from different resources within the broader repertoire of available themes. I have explained how the First *Intifada* added nonviolent resistance to the repertoire, and the Oslo process, peace. Hamas emphasized violence and added a discursively emphatic view of Islam to the stock of available themes. I also illustrated how transgressions at the Haram al-Sharif sparked the Second *Intifada* by violating the sacred core of the Palestinian Muslim religious imagination. Each of these political developments has had a lasting influence on how Muslims in Jerusalem understand, articulate, and perform piety today. But how have these dynamics played themselves out in Jerusalem on the ground, day-by-day?

Stuck between Two Hells

My friend Ahmed keeps a well-trimmed beard and looks young, but strands of gray are betraying his age. He is 45-years-old, has a pale

²⁸⁹ Richter-Devroe, "Gender and Conflict Transformation in Palestine: Women's Political Activism between Local and International Agendas," 258; Tobias Kelly, "The Attractions of Accountancy: Living an Ordinary Life During the Second Palestinian Intifada," *Ethnography* 9, no. 3 (2008): 353.

complexion, and eyes that show signs of stress and resignation. Ahmed is a man of many responsibilities and few means. He has six children, cannot find work and is over 500,000 ILS (approx. \$140,000) in debt. He was raised in Jerusalem's Old City but after persistent difficulties (most beyond his control), decided to move with his family to Qafr Aqab, an area severed from Jerusalem by The Wall. He sometimes joked that he lived his life "stuck between two hells."²⁹⁰



*The Wall under construction in al-Ram, East Jerusalem 2006.
Photo Credit: (B'Tselem 2017).*

After the 1967 War, Israel adopted an unspoken two-pronged policy in Jerusalem: rapidly increase the Jewish population and hinder the growth of the Arab population (or force it to leave). Israel understood that whoever physically dominated the city would determine its fate.²⁹¹ The logic was precisely what I described above—creation and elimination. The policy served the settler-colonial structure of

²⁹⁰ Personal Interview, Qafr Aqab, East Jerusalem, September 1, 2015.

²⁹¹ Amir Cheshin, Bill Hutman, and Avi Melamed, *Separate and Unequal: The inside Story of Israeli Rule in East Jerusalem* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999), 10.

disruption.²⁹² In this section, I move from a conceptual account of Islam, Palestinian nationalism, settler-colonialism, and various political improvisations to a focused discussion of how these dynamics work themselves out in the daily lives of Jerusalemites. I continue unpacking Wolfe's structural notion of settler-colonialism through political, legal, economic, and social events.²⁹³ Disruptions in East Jerusalem today are ongoing, pervasive, and almost all-consuming. Every Muslim religious practice in Jerusalem is somehow linked into these disruptions.

Israel expanded Jerusalem's municipal boundaries in 1967 and allowed Jerusalemites to apply for Israeli citizenship, but did not impose it on them.²⁹⁴ Jerusalemites declined in mass, arguing they would never make an oath of allegiance to the Israeli government. Israel then gave them 'permanent residency.' But to Jerusalemites, the notion of permanent residency has always been oxymoronic: How could their residence be permanent if Israel can revoke whenever they like?²⁹⁵ Since 1967, Jerusalemites have faced an ongoing sense of impermanence and the possible disruption of their lives.

Israel annexed East Jerusalem in 1980. They drew boundaries to maximize territorial gains while minimizing the inclusion of

²⁹² Even the term "East Jerusalem" is indicative of the Israeli narrative dominance. As Anne Shlay and Gillad Rosen aptly point out, "... East Jerusalem's political identity and position within the conflict have been constructed by Israelis, not Palestinians." Labeling the eastern, occupied part of the city "East Jerusalem" was an Israeli decision, not a Palestinian one. Shlay and Rosen, *Jerusalem: The Spatial Politics of a Divided Metropolis*, 139.

²⁹³ For more commentary on the various domains of dispossession in Jerusalem, see Sarah Ihmoud, "Mohammed Abu-Khdeir and the Politics of Racial Terror in Occupied Jerusalem," *Borderlands* 14, no. 1 (2015): 5; Nadera Shalhoub-Kevorkian, *Security Theology, Surveillance and the Politics of Fear* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015).

²⁹⁴ The move was odd as Israeli citizenship was imposed on Palestinians from the northern triangle. For details of the oddity, Jerusalemite permanent residency, and other complications regarding Israel's annexations of East Jerusalem, see: Ian Lustick, "Has Israel Annexed East Jerusalem?," *Middle East Policy* 5, no. 1 (1997a): 38-40.

²⁹⁵ As Usama Halabi pointed out, residency and citizenship are quantitatively different: residency is not automatically passed to children, it doesn't entail the right to vote in national elections, and residents have no unconditional right to stay. Usama Halabi, "Legal Status of the Population of East Jerusalem since 1967 and the Implications of Israeli Annexation on Their Civil and Social Rights," *The Civic Coalition for Palestinian Rights in Jerusalem* (2012), https://www.civiccoalition-jerusalem.org/uploads/9/3/6/8/93682182/legal_status_of_the_population_of_east_jerusalem_since_1967.pdf.

Palestinians.²⁹⁶ In 1988, the Israeli High Court adopted the 'Center of Life' ruling which the Ministry of the Interior began implementing in 1995. The ruling stipulated that Palestinians had to prove Jerusalem was their 'center of life' (i.e., the location of their residency) otherwise their Jerusalemite status would be revoked. Since then, over 14,000 Jerusalemites have had their permanent residency revoked.²⁹⁷ The Palestinian sense of impermanence has been underscored by their gradual dispossession from the city.

Jerusalemites are discriminated against in municipal budget allocations, too. In 2014, Michael Dumper reported that a meager 12% of the municipal budget is earmarked for East Jerusalem, while 88% is spent in West Jerusalem and Israeli settlements.²⁹⁸ Dumper flagged Cheshin's groundbreaking study that pointed out funds for the Palestinian sector were also diverted to Israeli projects such the construction of Road 1 and a football stadium in West Jerusalem.²⁹⁹ Claiming Palestinians receive 12%, in other words, is generous and somewhat misleading. One particular area that suffers due to budgetary discrimination is education.³⁰⁰ Teachers are grossly underpaid and lack basic materials. East Jerusalem had a shortage of approximately 1,200 classrooms in 2010. Abd al-Karim Lafi, head of East Jerusalem's parents' committee, appeared before the Knesset, imploring for funds —“In Israel, they talk about a computer for every child. We are only asking for a chair for every child.”³⁰¹ Sadly, these deficiencies translate

²⁹⁶ Ray Dolphin and Graham Usher, *The West Bank Wall: Unmaking Palestine* (London: Pluto Press, 2006), 114-15.

²⁹⁷ For details, see B'Tselem, "Separation Barrier," (2017), https://www.btselem.org/separation_barrier; Palestinian Academic Society for the Study of International Affairs (PASSIA), *Passia Diary 2015*, 448-49.

²⁹⁸ Dumper, *Jerusalem Unbound: Geography, History, and the Future of the Holy City*, 94.

²⁹⁹ Cheshin, Hutman, and Melamed, *Separate and Unequal: The inside Story of Israeli Rule in East Jerusalem*.

³⁰⁰ Other topics such as infrastructure, city planning, or garbage collection could easily be discussed.

³⁰¹ Cohen, *The Rise and Fall of Arab Jerusalem: Politics and the City since 1967*, 89.

into a yearly dropout rate of over 40%. The issue of education in East Jerusalem is dreadfully bleak.

In the early 1990s, Israel began placing systematic movement restrictions on Palestinians. These restrictions took the form of checkpoints, road closures, fences, and various blocks. Palestinian ability to move freely could no longer be assumed or guaranteed. Eventually, Israeli military elite began discussing a separation wall. But for fear of international criticism, they never moved forward with the plan. In 2000, however, with the collapse of the Camp David Accords and outbreak of the Second *Intifada*, Israel had the pretext they needed to counter international criticism for building the wall: security. In 2002, Israel began constructing The Wall around the West Bank. Construction in Jerusalem was completed in 2006. With a similar logic to the expansion of municipal boundaries, Israel traced the wall's path with two objectives, minimal Palestinian inclusion and maximum room for settlement expansion. Palestinian neighborhoods were physically cut in two, and four specific communities—Al-Ram, Qafr Aqab, Qalandia and Shuafat Camp—were severed from the rest of Jerusalem. The Wall, thus, not only detached Jerusalem from the West Bank, it severed Jerusalemites from Jerusalem.³⁰² And many of my interlocutors lived in these communities.³⁰³

Al-Ram had experienced a population swell in the 1980s since it was drawn outside Jerusalem's municipality borders (and, therefore, not subject to building restrictions), but when Israel built the wall, the community was cut off from the rest of Jerusalem (See Photo above). Fearing the revocation of their permanent residency, over 60% of the community's population fled. In Qafr Aqab, Qalandia, and Shuafat Camp, however, the wall had the opposite effect. Since these communities fell within the municipal-boundary redraw, Palestinians had no fear of losing their residency. Thousands flocked to these areas. While, technically, the areas were still subject to the same municipality

³⁰² Dolphin and Usher, *The West Bank Wall: Unmaking Palestine*, Chapter 3.

³⁰³ Readers will recall Chapter 2 where I mentioned living in al-Ram for one and Beit Hanina two years.

building restrictions, Israel did nothing to enforce them. These neighborhoods experienced unprecedented and unregulated population growth. Today, over 90,000 Jerusalemites live in these areas—about 25% of all Jerusalemites—and each has become a massive overrun urban slum.³⁰⁴ Poverty is rampant.³⁰⁵ They are havens for drug dealers and weapons smugglers. Problems pervade all levels of the community: administration and electricity, infrastructure and schooling, taxation and policing. Israel wants nothing to do with these areas and has left them for decay. The Palestinian Authority has no jurisdiction to administer them either. Candace Graff accurately described these communities as ‘pockets of lawlessness.’³⁰⁶

Beyond these four communities, The Wall has had a devastating impact on all East Jerusalem. It has ravaged the economy.³⁰⁷ With few fellow Palestinians in their stores, Jerusalemites have seen a dramatic downturn in their businesses. They can no longer access their fellow nationals in the West Bank with any ease or regularity; and, vice versa, Palestinians from the West Bank can no longer enter Jerusalem without Israeli permission. The Wall has caused immense social strain since many Jerusalemites have relatives on the other side of The Wall. Husbands and wives have been separated, for example, because one partner does not have Jerusalem residency.³⁰⁸ On numerous occasions, I watched parents pass their small children through checkpoints to visit their mom or dad.

³⁰⁴ For a detailed study of these communities, see: Candace Graff, "Pockets of Lawlessness in the "Oasis of Justice", *Jerusalem Quarterly* 58(2014).

³⁰⁵ Approximately 78% of Jerusalemites live under the poverty line. Nisreen Alyan, Ronit Sela, and Michal Pomerantz, "Policies of Neglect in East Jerusalem: The Policies That Created 78% Poverty Rates and a Frail Job Market," *The Association for Civil Rights in Israel* (ACRI), 2012.

³⁰⁶ Graff, "Pockets of Lawlessness in the "Oasis of Justice"."

³⁰⁷ For a helpful article outlining the economic effect of the occupation and other issues related to this section, see Nazmi Jubeh, "Jerusalem: Five Decades of Subjection and Marginalization," *Journal of Palestine Studies* 67(2015).

³⁰⁸ Palestinians from Jerusalem and any other Palestinian city, for example, had been marrying inter-communally for generations. Moving to Qafr 'Aqab became one of the only options for families to stay together after the wall was build.

When Ahmed joked that he lived his life “stuck between two hells,” he was referring to Israel’s apathy and the Palestinian Authority’s impotence in Qafar Aqab specifically. But he would say the same for each of these issues—municipal boundaries, permanent residency, ‘center of life,’ municipal budget, education, movement restrictions, The Wall, or economic strain. These make up the structure of settler-colonialism in East Jerusalem. They paint a vivid picture of the disruptions Palestinian Jerusalemites face every day. Their lives are permeated with uncertainty. And people continue to practice their faith in spite of—or, as I argue, *because of*—these disruptions.

Conclusion: Jerusalemites Belong to the City

Jerusalemites have had a harrowing experience, no doubt. One evening in 2014 at a public event, I found myself sitting beside Abu Saleem, a 70-year-old Jerusalemite. His hair was bed-sheet white, and his cane never left his side. As we spoke, he cherry-picked stories from his full and difficult life. At one point he quipped:

If anyone, anywhere in the world, wants a new Passport, they have to travel the globe and go through many obstacles. But I just stay home —Jerusalemites just stay home. People come and give us passports and identity cards all the time. I’ve been Ottoman, British, Jordanian, Palestinian, and even Israeli—and I never left my house.³⁰⁹

While Abu Saleem was aiming for a rise (which he got), the frank truth of his words were exactly what made his comment funny—and sad.

Numerous regimes have laid claim to his political identity; but, ultimately, Abu Saleem’s most important allegiance is to the city. This was what he kept telling me that evening, how much he belonged to and loved his city.

Sari Nusseibeh, former President of Al-Quds University and leading city figure, explained it this way: “Arab families... belong to the city far more than they belong either to an Israeli nation or a Palestinian nation. These are people who belong to the actual city and for whom it

³⁰⁹ Personal Interview, Ramallah, September 13, 2013.

is extremely difficult to exist without thinking of themselves as belonging to Jerusalem.”³¹⁰

Jerusalemites are residents of Islam’s third holiest city. They draw from sacred texts as well as the city’s distant and recent pasts to cast an (un)disrupted vision for how to practice their faith today. They were pioneers of the Palestinian national project, creating shared solidarities between diverse groups; Muslims and Christians, peasants and urbanites—even promoting religious overlap. But on account of Israel’s settler-colonial project—and its sheer disruptive force—Jerusalemites have experienced massive social and political upheavals. And since rituals are more likely to change in weakened or threatened societies, one should expect to find significant ritual adaptations in the city. In the next three chapters, I explain how different ritual adaptations (i.e., improvisations) drew from the repertoire of themes discussed here but also had various levels of resonance.

³¹⁰ Sari Nusseibeh, "Negotiating a City: A Perspective of a Jerusalemite," in *Jerusalem: Idea and Reality*, ed. Tamar Mayer and Suleiman Ali Mourad (New York: Routledge, 2008), 200.

Chapter 5

The Naqshbandi: The Dissonance of Peace

We [Sheikh al-Bukhari and I] organized a gathering at an Islamic holy place in the desert with over a hundred people... without preparing for it, without really organizing for it, we said let's do a dhikr in Nabi Musa... and we sat there and we meditated for hours, and you could feel the real spirit; it was like we were sitting in Heaven.³¹¹

- Rabbi Eliyahu McLean

Dhikr in the Desert



*The Nabi Musa Maqam south of Jericho.
Photo Credit (Wikipedia 2017).*

Rabbi Eliyahu McLean, quoted above, is a Jewish inter-faith peace activist. He is describing the first *Nabi Musa* experience he and Sheikh Abdul Aziz al-Bukhari, leader of the Naqshbandi Sufi Order in Jerusalem, spontaneously organized—a shared Muslim-Jewish inter-faith ritual experience. But how did such an improvised event occur? My concern is neither phone calls nor car rides, but how the one-hundred-plus participants came to view the Nabi Musa *dhikr* experience as an authentic faith expression and more, a constructive way to make peace. I argue that Sheikh al-Bukhari drew from the power of religious rituals to link people to the abstract vision of peace. He also drew from

³¹¹ Marc Gopin, *Bridges Across an Impossible Divide: The Inner Lives of Arab and Jewish Peacemakers* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 68.

his authority as a Sufi sheikh and other resources from the broader Palestinian repertoire of themes.

While, on one level, this chapter is a peculiar story of creative religious improvisations, it is also an account of Israel's disruption of religious rituals. I am concerned with institutional disruptions specifically. While they are categorically different than the physical disruption of a single prayer, for example, they are no less problematic. Religious institutions, by their collective nature, are one mechanism by which people come to understand and practice religious rituals. And by this collective nature, institutions easily get entangled with state politics. Thus, when it comes to Israel's settler-colonial project as the source of institutional disruptions, cooperation and resistance can both be problematic. I argue in this chapter, therefore, that institutional disruptions have created an affordance for particular religious improvisations with the Naqshbandi Sufi order in Jerusalem. Sheikh al-Bukhari aimed his improvisations at fostering peace between Muslim and Jews. And while some found resonance with his efforts (particularly those within his close circle of influence), the improvisations were ultimately too discordant to develop traction among Jerusalem's Muslims at large. Al-Bukhari's improvisations fall into the first category of improvisational effect—they fell flat.

To develop the argument, I have organized material around several sub-sections. I first orient readers to the phenomenon of Sufism, defining it and explaining how colonial forces have disseminated self-serving knowledge about it, either positive or negative, depending on circumstance. The material casts the first rays of light on how Sufis are invariably drawn into the realm of state politics. I next outline several features of the Naqshbandi as a Brotherhood and institution, focusing on the particular discourses and practices that inform and undergird Sheikh al-Bukhari's improvisations. I then bring Sufism to Jerusalem. I make several observations about its historical emergence and shared features with other Sufi brotherhoods, noting that the Naqshbandi fit the typical Jerusalem-Sufism pattern. I then examine Israel's institutional disruption of Sufism, arguing that the acute

disruptions of the 1948 and 1967 Wars led to the extinction of all Brotherhoods except three. The Brotherhoods that survived then had their fate determined by the position they took to the Israeli state. I focus next on Sheikh al-Bukhari, discussing the basis of his religious authority, his positionality, and how he ‘saw the light’ and became a proponent of peace activism. These dynamics, ultimately, gave him license to improvise with his faith tradition. The next section explains how al-Bukhari took the abstract idea of peace and created traction for it by inviting Muslims and Jews to join one another in shared religious rituals. While al-Bukhari’s conciliatory approach did resonate with a small group of followers and kept the Israeli State at bay, it undermined the Naqshbandi’s standing among fellow Jerusalemites. Institutional cooperation with the Israeli State became an insidious form of disruption because members of the broader Muslim community found al-Bukhari’s improvisations too discordant with other established ritual themes.

This chapter develops several of the study’s primary concerns. The diversity of the Muslim experience in Jerusalem is one. By highlighting one form of Sufism that is neither well-known nor well-understood, I add complexity and nuance to our understanding of how Muslims themselves understand, define, and practice their faith. As mentioned in Chapter 3, Ron Geaves is the only scholar to have written on Sufism in contemporary Jerusalem, and, by his admission, his conclusions were provisional and tentative. I build upon his work substantially.

Like previous chapters, sacred space and the physical location of rituals are of central concern; they inform religious practices in and around al-Aqsa Mosque. This chapter, however, includes a unique dimension. Sufis are known, generally, for religious practices in and around shrines, cemeteries, tombs, or *maqams* (mausoleums), and Sufis in Jerusalem have a long tradition of participation in these rituals, too. While these practices have diminished on account of the conflict and other dynamics, they remain a significant part of the story here. In Chapter 4, I noted how the yearly processional to *Nabi Musa* became a site for imagining the Palestinian national conscience during the early

British Mandate period. The festival became a communal, national act with shared participation by Muslims and Christians. Here, I demonstrate how the site has remained a location for inter-faith participation, but the participants and the meanings they ascribe to their rituals have changed. Muslims and Jews have improvised a new way of expressing interfaith solidarities at the site.

Finally, a methodological qualification is in order. Sheikh Al-Bukhari died in 2010, eighteen-months before my fieldwork began. The Naqshbandi stopped meeting regularly after his death. This meant that I was unable to interview al-Bukhari personally or participate directly in Naqshbandi activities. To sidestep this methodological difficulty, I have relied on material for this chapter from four sources: interviews with al-Bukhari's associates, Jerusalemites with knowledge of his work, materials developed for promoting interfaith engagement, and academic studies on Sufism in Israel.

Sufism, Colonialism, and Global Landscapes

While giving a historical tour of Sufi institutions in Jerusalem, Yusuf Natcheh, director of Tourism and Architecture at al-Aqsa Mosque, claimed that there are over 1,000 definitions of Sufism.³¹² To cite two examples: "Sufism is to possess nothing and to be possessed by nothing," or "Sufism is to sacrifice one's soul—but not to occupy yourself with the small talk of the Sufis."³¹³ These two definitions conceptualize Sufism in starkly different terms, but they only hint at the various ways it has been understood through time and space. Linda Sijbrand points out that "definitions of Sufism are part of 'a continuous debate on the meanings of Islam' not only in academic circles, but also in contemporary Islamic discourse as people are vying for the authority to speak for Islam and define what Sufism is."³¹⁴ The problem is

³¹² Yusuf Natcheh, *Sufism in Jerusalem*. Al-Quds University, Center for Jerusalem Studies Guided Tour. April 4, 2015.

³¹³ Annemarie Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions of Islam* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1975), 15.

³¹⁴ Linda Marianne Sijbrand, "The Social Role of Spiritual Communication: Authority as a Relationship between Shaykh and Follower in the Contemporary Tariqa Shadhuliyya-Yashrutiyya in Amman, Acre and Jaffa" (PhD diss., Exeter University, 2014), 53.

compounded further by some Orientalists—and some Muslims themselves—who adopt essentialist views of Sufism. Some have even argued that Sufism, with its vast array of definitions and expressions, is somehow exogenous to the Islamic tradition—a “foreign doctrine grafted into Islam.”³¹⁵ But Sufis themselves take issue with this characterization: they see Sufism as firmly rooted in the Islamic tradition.

Linguistically, the term Sufism is most closely related to the Arabic verbal noun *tasawwuf* (the fifth-form of the Arabic trilateral root S-W-F) that initially meant wearing wool but, over time, came to be understood as “making oneself into a Sufi.”³¹⁶ But according to Shahzad Bashir, “Historically, *tasawwuf* demarcates a highly contested domain and is a term invoked by different individuals and groups to legitimate particular ways of being Sufi while also castigating the behavior of others, perceived as corruptions.”³¹⁷ How, then, should we understand Sufism and *tasawwuf* if they have been understood and debated in such various ways? I address this question by viewing Sufism like Bashir who understands it as an “analytical horizon” where “an internally variegated array of ideas and practices that, taken together, forms an integral and crucial part of the complex intellectual and sociocultural histories of Islamic societies.”³¹⁸ Sufism, in other words, has deployed diverse religious discourses and practices that have taken shape through various systems of religious authority across

³¹⁵ Carl W. Ernst, “Sufism, Islam, and Globalization in the Contemporary World: Methodological Reflections on a Changing Field of Study,” in *Fourth Victor Danner Memorial Lecture* (Indiana University 2006), 6.

³¹⁶ According to Bashir, “The prescriptive nature of *tasawwuf* within Sufi usage is evident from the fact that all definitions of it in major early Arabic sources revolve around the following three issues: *tasawwuf* represents cultivating an ascetic lifestyle combined with yearning for God; it connotes conducting oneself with proper manners (*adab*)—including elements such as humility, patience, generosity, etc.—in the course of all one’s social interactions with respect to those who are above or below one in spiritual attainment; and it indicates acquiring intuitive knowledge, which cannot be learned from books, and progress along stations that draw one closer to God.” Shahzad Bashir, *Sufi Bodies: Religion and Society in Medieval Islam* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011), 10, 218n15.

³¹⁷ *Sufi Bodies: Religion and Society in Medieval Islam* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011), 10.

³¹⁸ *Sufi Bodies: Religion and Society in Medieval Islam*, 10, 11.

time and space. Sufism, in this sense, has an inherent improvisational capacity.

While the previous paragraph hinted that Western understanding of Sufism had been complicated by orientalist epistemologies (i.e., Orientalists have made authoritative claims about what is—and is not—Islam), one additional point merits specific attention: the West has also created knowledge about Sufism to serve its own political interests.³¹⁹ While the earliest accounts of Western engagement with Sufism go back to the Middle Ages, Orientalists began taking a keen interest in the 1850s.³²⁰ They typically evaluated it through one of two lenses: through Sufi texts (labeling them ‘Islamic Mysticism’) or practices (labeling them ‘popular expressions’).³²¹ And colonial states used this knowledge to portray Sufis as either partners or threats. Sufis were either ‘good Muslims’ and co-opted to serve colonial powers, or they were construed as ‘extremists’ and suppressed accordingly.³²² The latter was the fate of Sufis in British Mandate Palestine—they were portrayed as, “...anti-modern and anti-Western and accused of being charlatans and magicians.”³²³ While Israel has almost completely reversed its view in recent years (a point I unpack shortly), Sufis in Palestine have had a complicated relationship with the Israeli State, in either case. And both ways have involved insidious disruptions by the Israeli State.

Before I observe Israeli disruptions among the Naqshbandi in Jerusalem, however, a brief discussion of the contemporary transformation of Sufism is necessary. Sufism, globally, has undergone formative changes within the modern global context. Sufi scholars,

³¹⁹ Elizabeth Sirriyeh, *Sufis and Anti-Sufis: The Defense, Rethinking and Rejection of Sufism in the Modern World* (London: Curzon, 1999), Chapter 2; Ron Geaves, Markus Dressler, and Gritt Klinkhammer, *Sufis in Western Society: Global Networking and Locality* (London: Routledge, 2009), 1-3.

³²⁰ See, for example, the work of Ramon Lull, the Catalanian scholar and mystic (d. 1316). Found in Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions of Islam*, 7.

³²¹ Carl W. Ernst, *The Shambhala Guide to Sufism* (Boston MA: Shambhala, 1997), 21-31.

³²² Knut S. Vikor, "Sufism and Colonialism," in *The Cambridge Companion to Sufism*, ed. Lloyd Ridgeon (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015).

³²³ Geaves, "That Which We Have Forgotten': The Emergence of 'Traditional Islam' as a New Movement in Global Muslim Religious Contestation," 32.

sheikhs, and orders have labored extensively to re-articulate what it means to live and practice the Sufi way. One particular adaptation has been blurring the boundaries of allegiance, authority, and belonging. For one to claim they are following the Sufi path, a *myrid* (novice/ apprentice) is no longer obliged to commit themselves to a single Sufi Order or sheikh. They can draw from the tradition as they see fit. The result has been a ‘fragmentation of authority.’³²⁴ This fragmentation has been so substantial that spiritual development can now occur outside the institutional structure of traditional Brotherhoods.³²⁵ As a result, saying who is—and is not—a Sufi has become increasingly difficult in the modern world.

The difficulty of identifying who is Sufi has also lead scholars debate the contemporary state of Sufism—is it declining or on the rise? Those on the declining-side point to the ascendancy of more fundamentalist streams of Islam that emphasize orthodox observance and minimize transcendent experiences that are more typical of the Sufism.³²⁶ Scholars on the inclining-side point to Sufism’s unexpected resurgence since the 1970s. Daphna Ephrat explains:

In recent decades, the opposition of both Muslim and non-Muslim governments to radical fundamentalism and the growing demand for Islamic forms of personal and collective piety have resulted in a marked revival of Sufi activities. Several Sufi fraternities have managed to preserve their traditions, develop new forms of disseminating their teachings and legacies, and even expand into

³²⁴ The ‘fragmentation of authority’ has been observed on a wide scale and is decisively relevant for Sufis, too. Eickelman and Piscatori, *Muslim Politics*, 131-35.

³²⁵ Sijbrand, "The Social Role of Spiritual Communication: Authority as a Relationship between Shaykh and Follower in the Contemporary Tariqa Shadhuliyya-Yashrutiyya in Amman, Acre and Jaffa," 122.

³²⁶ The differences between Sufi and Salafi ideologies is not as stark or straightforward as the dichotomous characterization conveys. In Jerusalem, for example, one Salafi sheikh is working on a biography of Imam al-Ghazali which appreciates al-Ghazali’s ‘Sufi oriented’ ideas (Personal Interview, Mustafa Abu Sway, April 28, 2016). More careful and nuanced discussions are needed to tease out the way these two ideological trends diverge and overlap. For two helpful studies, see: Itzhak Weismann, *Taste of Modernity: Sufism, Salafiyya, and Arabism in Late Ottoman Damascus* (Leiden: Brill, 2001); *Sirriyeh, Sufis and Anti-Sufis: The Defense, Rethinking and Rejection of Sufism in the Modern World*.

new enterprises in the various realms of religious, social, and political life.³²⁷

Sufis have, thus, adapted themselves to the global challenges of modernization and Islamic fundamentalism, maintaining their particular religious outlooks despite shifting global landscapes.

Each dimension discussed above—definitions, knowledge production, colonial legacies, and contemporary transformations—is critical for understanding the Naqshbandi in Jerusalem today. They have been influenced by these broader historical and contemporary landscapes. The inevitable—and disruptive—links between Sufism and the colonial state are of particular importance to the Naqshbandi case. Carl Ernst, a leading scholar of Sufism, explains how Sufis get entangled with State politics: "...whether the state attempts to outlaw Sufism or merely regulates its institutional centers, much of the energy of contemporary Sufi groups must go into negotiating the forms of their social existence within the limitations imposed by the state."³²⁸ For Sufis in Jerusalem, Israel is the state with whom they must negotiate. And while Sufism may be on the rise globally, Sufism in Palestinian has seen a sharp decline.

The Naqshbandi: History, Discourse, and Practice

With an active presence on every continent, the Naqshbandi are one of the largest Sufi brotherhoods in the world. Scholars have studied them extensively.³²⁹ The Brotherhood initially consolidated in the 12th century under the leadership of Abu Yacoub Yusuf al-Hamdani (d. 1140) and was known initially as the Kharajawan, a reference to the group's

³²⁷ Daphna Ephrat, *Spiritual Wayfarers, Leaders in Piety: Sufis and the Dissemination of Islam in Medieval Palestine* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2008), 195.

³²⁸ Ernst, "Sufism, Islam, and Globalization in the Contemporary World: Methodological Reflections on a Changing Field of Study," 6-7. For additional studies addressing the relationship between Sufis and States, see Samuli Schielke, "Policing Ambiguity: Muslim Saints-Day Festivals and the Moral Geography of Public Space in Egypt," *American Ethnologist* 35, no. 4 (2008); Fait Muedini, *Sponsoring Sufism: How Governments Promote 'Mystical Islam' in Their Domestic and Foreign Policies* (London: Palgrave MacMillan, 2015).

³²⁹ For scholarly resources on the Naqshbandi, see references cited throughout this chapter.

town of origin. With time, the Brotherhood took on the Naqshbandi appellation. The name came from Muhammed ibn Baha-iddin an-Naqshbandi (d. 1389), the sixth successor after al-Hamdani. He received a divine revelation while visiting the grave of the famous *Hadith* compiler, Imam Bukhari. There, the secrets of the chain of authority (*silsila*) were revealed to him, linking the Naqshbandi to the prophet Muhammad through Abu Bakr, the first Caliph.³³⁰

One Naqshbandi distinctive is their method of practicing *dhikr* (remembrance of God). *Dhikr* is a ubiquitous Sufi practice with a rich diversity of forms and content. Generally, it takes one of two forms, vocal or silent (*jahri* or *khafi*). And while most Sufi brotherhoods practice *dhikr* vocally and may include silent *dhikr* in advanced stages of training, the Naqshbandi distinctive is to practice it silently from the beginning. On this basis, the Naqshbandi claim superiority to other brotherhoods because "its point of departure (*bidaya*) was the end (*nihaya*) of all other paths."³³¹ The early Naqshbandi leader, 'Abd al-khaliq Ghijduwani (d. 1179), developed the silent *dhikr* practice upon Abu Bakr's precedent.³³² Two further points set the stage for later analysis: first, not only was Naqshbandiyya *dhikr* silent, it was to be performed with "all but the most minimal bodily movements."³³³ Second, those performing *dhikr* were to focus their attention on the name of the divine essence (*ism al-dhat*, *Allah*), or the first half of the *shahada*, 'there is no god but God.'³³⁴ While silent *dhikr* has been a Naqshbandiyya distinctive since the

³³⁰ Hamid Algar, "Silent and Vocal Dhikr in the Naqshbandi Order," *Akten des VII. Kongresses für Arabistik und Islamwissenschaft*, Göttingen 15, no. 22 (1974): 41; Charmaine Seitz, "The Distracted Sufi: The Naqshbandi Tariqa in Jerusalem," *Jerusalem Quarterly File*, no. 20 (2004).

³³¹ Algar, "Silent and Vocal Dhikr in the Naqshbandi Order," 40.

³³² For Qur'anic references and further details, see: "Silent and Vocal Dhikr in the Naqshbandi Order," 41; Ian Richard Netton, *Sufi Ritual: The Parallel Universe* (London: Routledge, 2000), 79-80.

³³³ Algar, "Silent and Vocal Dhikr in the Naqshbandi Order," 40.

³³⁴ Weismann, *Taste of Modernity: Sufism, Salafiyya, and Arabism in Late Ottoman Damascus* (Leiden: Brill, 2001), 38.

Brotherhood's inception, I must point out that some have begun to use vocal *dhikr* recently and occasionally.³³⁵

Like other Sufi orders, the Naqshbandi view Muhammad's Night Journey as a cornerstone of their sacred imagination. And while their interpretations of the event differs from most, the account sets an important precedent. Charmaine Seitz explains:

According to Naqshbandi tradition, upon the Prophet Muhammad's ascension to heaven in the Night Journey, he was offered a vision of all of creation and entrusted with maintaining its purity. When the prophet worried that this was too great a burden for him alone, he was shown another vision of 7,007 Naqshbandi saints (*awliyya*), then 313 more of added purity, and then another 40 saints to whom would be disclosed the secrets of the chain [*silsila*]. "At the hands of these saints everyone will be healed from his wounds, both externally and internally," explicated Sheikh Nazim al-Haqqani (b. 1922). "These saints will be able to carry the whole Nation and the whole of Creation without any sign of tiring. Everyone of them will be the Ghawth (Arch-Intercessor) in his time, under whom will be the five Qutub (Spiritual Poles).³³⁶

The Night Journey account, thus, set a high bar for Muhammad's responsibility—maintaining the purity of all creation. But God would give him support through the Naqshbandi saints. The vision is important because it sets a precedence for being involved in worldly affairs, the second feature that distinguishes the Naqshbandi from other Brotherhoods.

To further unpack the worldly-affairs precedent, the Naqshbandi Order crystalized around eleven guiding principles early in the brotherhood's development.³³⁷ They came to be known as the 'Rule of Life.' And one is particularly relevant for my present purpose, *khalwat dar anjuman* (solitude in the crowd).³³⁸ Sheikh Ghijduwani (mentioned earlier) developed the principle, and it set a precedent for the

³³⁵ For details, see: Netton, *Sufi Ritual: The Parallel Universe*, 81; Algar, "Silent and Vocal Dhikr in the Naqshbandi Order," 44-46.

³³⁶ Seitz, "The Distracted Sufi: The Naqshbandi Tariqa in Jerusalem," 57-58.

³³⁷ The 'Rule of Life' had eight dimensions, initially. It expanded to eleven later.

³³⁸ For further details, see: Netton, *Sufi Ritual: The Parallel Universe*, 77-79.

Naqshbandi to involve themselves in political and social affairs.³³⁹ Itzchak Weismann explains that “...the Naqshbandi stresses beyond the other orders its members’ duty to take part in public affairs, associating with people. ...Many of its masters have been involved in the social and political affairs of their countries, leaving their mark on their histories.”³⁴⁰ This Naqshbandi pre-disposition toward worldly involvement explains why the Brotherhood has traveled so far across time and space.³⁴¹ It also explains why Sheikh al-Bukhari took a leading role within his community.

Sufism in Jerusalem and the Naqshbandi Case

In this section, I outline the distinct historical characteristics of Sufism in Jerusalem and how the Naqshbandi fit within this historical trajectory. Within Islam, Muhammad’s Night Journey—*al-Isra’ wal-Mir’aj*—is the prototype for mystical encounters with the divine. According to Anne Marie Schimmel, “Muhammad is the first link in the spiritual chain of Sufism, and his ascension through the heavens into the divine presence, to which the first lines of Sūra 17 allude, became the prototype of the mystic’s spiritual ascension into the intimate presence of God.”³⁴² In this sense, Sufism in Jerusalem is discursively indigenous, and the city has been associated with Sufism since Islam began. The religious and historical precedence for Sufism in Jerusalem is markedly similar to material I covered in Chapter 4, so I do not repeat the material here. I focus, instead, on the two features directly relevant to the present case: First, while Jerusalem attracted many Sufi sojourners and scholars through history, it remained territorially and geographically provincial. No Sufi order originated in the city, and Sufism thrived in Jerusalem on account of transnational links. Second, the success of Sufi institutions in Jerusalem has always been linked to

³³⁹ Itzchak Weismann, *The Naqshbandiyya: Orthodoxy and Activism in a Worldwide Sufi Tradition* (London: Routledge, 2007), 11.

³⁴⁰ *Taste of Modernity: Sufism, Salafiyya, and Arabism in Late Ottoman Damascus*, 46.

³⁴¹ *The Naqshbandiyya: Orthodoxy and Activism in a Worldwide Sufi Tradition* (London: Routledge, 2007), 48.

³⁴² Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions of Islam*, 27.

the charisma of their local leadership. In 1948 and 1967, however, Israeli disruptions had a lasting impact on both these features.

Since Jerusalem became associated with Islam, the city has always drawn Sufis sojourners and scholars. Ephrat explains: "In medieval Palestine, Sufism was influenced primarily by the sanctity of its cities, their long-established position as centers of pilgrimage, and a cultural environment that was imbued with the living legacy of Eastern monasticism and direct encounters with Christian monks and holy men."³⁴³ Not only did Sufism proliferate in the early Islamic period, it developed a particular character in Palestine and Jerusalem as a site of pilgrimage. Visitors came from Morocco, Afghanistan, and everywhere between. The most celebrated sojourner-scholar was 'Abd al-Hamid al-Ghazali (d. 1111). He is said to have written parts of his influential work *Revival of Religious Sciences* (that included his *Epistle from Jerusalem*) during his two-year sojourn in the city.³⁴⁴ Other notable sojourners include Ibn Arabi (d. 1240), and Ali al-Hujwiri (d. 1072). Rabia al-Adawiyya (d.ca.792), the famous female mystic who pioneered the Sufi emphasis on God's love, is said to be buried on the Mount of Olives.³⁴⁵ These sojourners and scholar's accounts of experiences in Jerusalem are a valuable resource for understanding the historical contours of the city. But, importantly, not one of them was from Jerusalem.

No Sufi brotherhood originated in Jerusalem. A traveler or migrant started every Brotherhood. Beyond Saladin's Islamic endowments (See Chapter 4), the flourishing of Sufism in medieval Jerusalem is best understood as the result of each Brotherhood's effort to service and accommodate its fellow sojourners. The uniqueness of

³⁴³ Ephrat, *Spiritual Wayfarers, Leaders in Piety: Sufis and the Dissemination of Islam in Medieval Palestine*, 4.

³⁴⁴ *Spiritual Wayfarers, Leaders in Piety: Sufis and the Dissemination of Islam in Medieval Palestine*, 81. Some claim he composed the work at the Bab al-Rahma on the eastern side of the Haram al-Sharif where he maintained residence. The Arabic titles for the works were, respectively: *Ihya' Ulum al-Din*, and *al-Risala al-Qudsiyya*.

³⁴⁵ Sijbrand, "The Social Role of Spiritual Communication: Authority as a Relationship between Shaykh and Follower in the Contemporary Tariqa Shadhuliyya-Yashrutiyya in Amman, Acre and Jaffa," 55. For details on the debate regarding al-Adawiyya's burial location, see Rkia Elaroui Cornell, "Rabi'a from Narrative to Myth: The Tropics of Identity of a Muslim Woman Saint" (PhD diss., Free University of Amsterdam, 2013), 192.

Sufism in Jerusalem was, thus, its capacity for intersection—“The networks that they [the Sufis] formed cut across political and geographical boundaries and blurred regional differentiation.”³⁴⁶ The city became a nexus for the exchange and thrived on account of the transnational links that supported its presence. Jerusalem was, in other words, the city where Sufi paths crossed.

With the disruptions of the 1948 and 1967 Wars, the ability of Sufi institutions to maintain transnational links was severed. Sufis who wanted to visit the city faced logistic and ideological challenges. Logistically, Israel might forbid their entry or refuse to grant visas. Ideologically, they were faced with an ethical dilemma: should they fulfill their religious desire to visit the city or abstain on account of the implicit validation of the occupation? But Sufism in Jerusalem was more than accommodating visitors; it was about equipping local apprentices who found guidance from Sufi leaders.

The second distinct feature of Sufism in Jerusalem was local leadership. The fate of any Sufi institution in the formative medieval period was defined principally by the piety and charisma of the local leader—not the specific institution he belonged to. Daphne Ephrat explains: “In Palestine, the process by which individual Sufis and Sufi modes of piety gained prominence often took place outside the framework of an established and widespread *tariqa* [Brotherhood].”³⁴⁷ The importance of local leadership was paramount. After Sufi masters sojourned to the city, they gathered apprentices. Institutional vitality was, thus, really about the master-apprentice relationship and the

³⁴⁶ Ephrat, *Spiritual Wayfarers, Leaders in Piety: Sufis and the Dissemination of Islam in Medieval Palestine*, 80.

³⁴⁷ *Spiritual Wayfarers, Leaders in Piety: Sufis and the Dissemination of Islam in Medieval Palestine*, 133.

authority structure animating it.³⁴⁸ While a case can and should be made that Sufism's decline in Jerusalem is linked to leaders who died without clear successors, the disruptions of war had a ruinous effect on master-apprentice relationships in 1948 and 1967. As I observe shortly, Sufi masters and their apprentices were exiled. These disruptions placed a profound strain on Sufi institutions in Israel-Palestine.

Sufism in Jerusalem thrived on account of these two dynamics—transnational links and local leadership. They contributed to Sufism's acceptance and being a viable Islamic expression. In the following section, I elaborate how these dynamics were disrupted in the 1948 and 1967 wars. I now turn to the Naqshbandi, specifically, demonstrating how they, too, came to the city in the typical Jerusalem way.



*The front door of the Zawiyat al-Naqshbandi in Jerusalem's Old City.
Photo Credit (The Palestinian Information Center 2013).*

The Zawiyat al-Naqshbandi is located in Jerusalem's Old City on the famous Via Dolorosa, the Christian pilgrim thoroughfare. It is also situated in the Palestinian Bab Hutta neighborhood, one block north of

³⁴⁸ This particular dynamic has led scholars to debate the social impact of Sufi institutions in Jerusalem. Frederick De Jong, for one, argues that these institutions were socially insignificant, while Linda Marianne Sijbrand points out that De Jong's analysis neglects the role of the Sheikh who was generally understood as being the focal point of Sufi devotion in Jerusalem—not the institution. See, Frederick De Jong, "The Sufi Orders in Nineteenth and Twentieth-Century Palestine: A Preliminary Survey Concerning Their Identity, Organizational Characteristics and Continuity," *Studia Islamica* 58(1983): 155–56, 65–67; Sijbrand, "The Social Role of Spiritual Communication: Authority as a Relationship between Shaykh and Follower in the Contemporary Tariqa Shadhuliyya-Yashrutiyya in Amman, Acre and Jaffa," 204.

the Haram al-Sharif. The Zawiya's inconspicuous edifice belies its rich history as it blends in among the storefronts. The Naqshbandi came to Jerusalem in 1616 under the leadership of Sheikh Rasheed ibn Othman al-Bukhari. He was from Bukhara, Uzbekistan, the heartland of the Naqshbandi Brotherhood, and he came to teach his Naqshbandi form of Sufism. Since its inception, the Jerusalem branch has been a guest house for pilgrims and center of hospitality for the poor.³⁴⁹ And in its early years, preference was given to guests from Transoxiana, the land beyond the Oxus river (present-day Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, southern Kyrgyzstan, and southwest Kazakhstan).³⁵⁰ The geographical affinity explains why the Zawiya also developed the monikers al-Uzbakiyya and al-Bukhariyya, the names referring to Uzbekistan and Bukhara respectively. With time, Uzbeks began staying in the city and carving out their place in its history. While they maintained elements of their unique heritage, they assimilated into the city's social fabric—they became Palestinians.

In 1731, Sheikh Othman Bik al-Bukhari (son of Sheikh Rasheed ibn Othman al-Bukhari) expanded the *Zawiya* to include an Islamic school and an additional guest house. His successor was Sheikh Yacoub Rashid al-Bukhari, and he led in the late Ottoman period, logging some 400 to 500 visitors to the *Zawiya* per month.³⁵¹ The Naqshbandi also began involving themselves in politics in this period. Charmaine Seitz explains that “not only was the Uzbek center a meeting place for the religious and learned, it was also site of numerous political gatherings and reconciliatory talks, among these mediations between the senior and oft-competing Husseini and Nusseibi Jerusalem families.”³⁵² In a humorous anecdote, Seitz also points out that Sheikh

³⁴⁹ The branch has not been a center of theological exploration or influence in the larger Naqshbandi movement. See, Weismann, *The Naqshbandiyya: Orthodoxy and Activism in a Worldwide Sufi Tradition*, 37.

³⁵⁰ Frederick De Jong, "The Naqshbandiyya in Egypt and Syria: Aspects of Its History, and Observations Concerning Its Present-Day Condition," in *Naqshbandis: Historical Developments and Present Situation of a Muslim Mystical Order*, ed. M. Gaborieau, Th. Zarccone, and A. Popovic (London: Isis, 1990), 592.

³⁵¹ Seitz, "The Distracted Sufi: The Naqshbandi Tariqa in Jerusalem," 57.

³⁵² "The Distracted Sufi: The Naqshbandi Tariqa in Jerusalem," 60.

Yacoub al-Bukhari occasionally played body-double for Hajj Amin al-Husseini who regularly evaded British Mandate police in the 1920s. The quote and anecdote illustrate two things—that the Naqshbandi participated in the politics of the emerging Palestinian national project and that they had a predilection for the social project of peace and reconciliation. They were acting true to form according to their ‘Rule of Life,’ bending toward social engagement.

Like all other Sufi brotherhoods in Palestine, the Naqshbandi experienced profound disruptions on account of the 1948 and 1967 wars. Israel’s occupation of East Jerusalem almost extinguished the life of the Zawiya altogether. Many followers and community members were exiled to Jordan.³⁵³ And because the Naqshbandi thrived on transnational links, Israeli movement restrictions were crippling: brothers from abroad had difficulty accessing the Zawiya, too. Its function as a guest house diminished significantly. Fortunately, the group was able to maintain local leadership. Sheikh Yacoub Rasheed remained in the city throughout the turbulent period. And when he died (d. 1956), his son, Musa ibn Yacoub al-Bukhari, took leadership. After he passed away in 1979, he conferred leadership to his son, Abdul-Aziz al-Bukhari, the central figure in this study. The Naqshbandi and Uzbek communities, thus, maintained a small presence in Israel-Palestine with roughly 1,300 Palestinians of Uzbek origin.³⁵⁴ But it is important to note that not every Palestinian of Uzbek origin considered themselves a Sufi.

This section has shown how the Naqshbandi came to Jerusalem and carved out a unique place in the city’s history. They assimilated into the Palestinian national project as well as the Old City’s local community. Despite the disruptions of war, the group maintained its presence through consistent, personality-driven leadership. The rest of my analysis of the Naqshbandi revolves around Sheikh al-Bukhari and the conduit he became for religious improvisations at the Zawayat al-

³⁵³ Weismann, *The Naqshbandiyya: Orthodoxy and Activism in a Worldwide Sufi Tradition*, 97; Seitz, "The Distracted Sufi: The Naqshabandi Tariqa in Jerusalem," 57.

³⁵⁴ Stephen Schwartz, "With the Sufis of Israel," *Center for Islamic Pluralism* (August 9, 2006), <http://www.islamicpluralism.org/203/with-the-sufis-of-israel>.

Naqshbandi. But before that, I need to unpack further the institutional disruptions mentioned above.

The Acute Disruptions of War and What Remains

In this section, I examine Israeli disruptions to Sufi institutions in Jerusalem. These disruptions are linked to the observation in Chapter 4 where settler-colonialism is best understood as a structure that takes shape through specific events. The 1948 and 1967 wars were particularly disruptive and led to the virtual extinction of Sufi institutions in Jerusalem. In concrete terms, Jerusalem was home to 26 Sufi institutions before 1948; as of 2010, there were only two and, today, only one remains.

The 1948 and 1967 disruptions were the primary cause of Sufism's institutional demise in Palestine. Itzchak Weismann, author of *Sufi Brotherhoods in Syria and Israel: A Contemporary Overview*, argues that, "...The Jewish State of Israel exhibited almost total elimination of Sufi activity through the disruption in 1948."³⁵⁵ After the war, only three brotherhoods other than the Naqshbandi survived: the Shadhuliyya-Yashrutiyya, the Khalwatiyya-Rahmaniyya, and the Qadiriyya. The Shadhuliyya-Yashrutiyya Brotherhood has maintained a small presence in Akko, Um Fahem, and historical Jaffa despite the exile of its leader, Sheikh Ahmed al-Yashruti, as a result of the 1948 war.³⁵⁶ The *Khalwatiyya-Rahmaniyya* has remained active in Baqa al-Garbiyya, a town centrally located in Israel. The most noteworthy feature of this brotherhood is that Israel has supported it as a foil to the Islamic movement of Israel, a trend echoing the pattern where colonial powers construe Sufis as either partners or threats, 'good' Muslims or

³⁵⁵ Itzchak Weismann, "Sufi Brotherhoods in Syria and Israel: A Contemporary Overview," *History of Religions* 43, no. 4 (2004): 304.

³⁵⁶ For an in-depth study of this Sufi order, see Sijbrand, "The Social Role of Spiritual Communication: Authority as a Relationship between Shaykh and Follower in the Contemporary Tariqa Shadhuliyya-Yashrutiyya in Amman, Acre and Jaffa."

terrorists.³⁵⁷ The brotherhood has also gained influence in Hebron where they recently completed a large mosque building project. Finally, the *Qadiriyya* has maintained an active presence in Palestine and Jerusalem specifically where they are the only surviving brotherhood. Because they have an active Jerusalem presence, I will discuss them in more detail presently.

Despite their survival, each of these groups has suffered substantial setbacks. Weismann argues that their survival has been linked to their ability to adapt to the new Israeli realities.³⁵⁸ He gives three specific examples: First, they made accommodations; second, they developed national and transnational connections with other Brotherhood members; and, third, they have communicated a reformist agenda. In other words, acute Israeli disruptions—if they didn't cause the institution's complete extinction—forced the brotherhoods to improvise to survive. Weismann also noted that while, "... there was evidence of a partial revival after the renewal of contacts between Israeli Arabs with the Palestinians of the West Bank and Gaza following the 1967 War," this revival was limited and short-lived.³⁵⁹ And it fizzled for two reasons: Israel worked to undermine it, and the secular-nationalist vision for Palestinian liberation (Chapter 4) became more influential in the period. Ron Geaves estimates, given all of these factors, that roughly 10,000 practicing Sufis remain in Palestine today.³⁶⁰

Narrowing the focus to Jerusalem, Yusuf Natcheh noted that Jerusalem had been home to 26 Sufi Institutions, historically. According to Frederick De Jong that number had dwindled to 14 by the turn of the

³⁵⁷ To illustrate by concrete example: Israel has given the Khalwatiyya building permits and accredited their educational institutions, while they have actively worked against the Islamic movement, jailing its leaders. Mustafa Abu Sway, East Jerusalem, Personal Interview, April 28, 2016; Yusuf Natcheh, East Jerusalem, Personal Interview, May 4, 2016.

³⁵⁸ Weismann, "Sufi Brotherhoods in Syria and Israel: A Contemporary Overview," 318.

³⁵⁹ "Sufi Brotherhoods in Syria and Israel: A Contemporary Overview," 304. Charmaine Seitz also noted that small groups met in Ramallah and Jalazoun Refugee Camp. Seitz, "The Distracted Sufi: The Naqshabandi Tariqa in Jerusalem," 61n2.

³⁶⁰ Geaves, "'That Which We Have Forgotten': The Emergence of 'Traditional Islam' as a New Movement in Global Muslim Religious Contestation," 43.

twentieth century.³⁶¹ And after 1967, that number diminished to 3, the Naqshbandi, the Shadhuli, and the Qadariyya.³⁶² Each group survived—or died—on account of the position it took to the Israeli State. Since the Naqshbandi are the primary focus of this chapter, I leave discussion of them for a later section. The Shadhuli were active in the late 1970s and early 1980s, during the short-lived revival of Sufism in Palestine previously mentioned. They met at the *Sai'd wa Sayyid* Mosque on Nablus Road, north of the Old City near the north-bound Palestinian bus stop. The group was led by Sheikh Yacoub Tarish who, in his prime years, actively toured Palestine speaking at Palestinian universities and various public events. The group developed ties with *Fateh*, the paramilitary political group, and began taking an explicitly anti-occupation position. Israel did not like the development and began suppressing the group. Sheikh Tarish was imprisoned and later deported to Jordan. The Shadhuli brotherhood in Jerusalem dissolved after that. Sheikh Tarish eventually became a Jordanian parliamentarian and returned to Palestine with Yasser Arafat and the other political exiles in 1994. He took a West Bank ID and moved to Bethany in the West Bank. He was allowed to attend prayers in Jerusalem on Fridays because of his age, and he occasionally used the opportunity to address small groups of Muslims. But his political and religious leadership remained dormant otherwise.³⁶³ The Shadhuli's fate illustrates Israel's direct disruption of Sufi institutions. They took an anti-colonial position, and it led to their demise.

The *Qadariyya*, led by Sheikh Abdel Karim al-Afghani, operate out of the Zawiyat al-Afghani in the Bab Hitta community. The group

³⁶¹ He lists the brotherhoods as follows: Ahmadiyya, Disuqiyya, Rifa'iyya, Qadariyya, Sa'diyya, Yunusiyya, Wafa'iyya, Shadhiliyya-Wafa'iyya, Shadhiliyya-Yashrutiyya, Khalwatiyya-Sammaniyya, Khalwatiyya-Sawiyya, Naqshbandiyya, Naqshbandiyya-Khalidiyya, Mawlawiyya. De Jong, "The Sufi Orders in Nineteenth and Twentieth-Century Palestine: A Preliminary Survey Concerning Their Identity, Organizational Characteristics and Continuity."

³⁶² During fieldwork, I heard second- and third-hand rumors that there was also a small group of Sufis meeting in Al-Tur on the Mount of Olives, but, ultimately, I was unable to corroborate the information. If such a group exists, their presence and influence are minimal.

³⁶³ Mustafa Abu Sway, East Jerusalem, Interview April 28, 2016.

has survived by choosing the path of political quietism. Sheikh al-Afghani has encouraged his disciples to focus on their religious practices and, by so doing, transcend the temporal and corporeal difficulties of occupation. This program has kept the Israeli state at bay. The group has also maintained a good reputation among Jerusalemites by hosting spiritually oriented celebrations around minor Islamic holidays (*al-'Isra' wal-Mi'raj*, *al-Mawlid al-Nabiyyi*, and *Hijra*). During my fieldwork, I observed that if someone was aware of the *Qadariyya*, their main connection point was the celebrations.

One afternoon in 2016, I asked Mustafa Abu Sway, the Integral Chair for the Study of Imam Ghazali's Work at al-Aqsa Mosque, to estimate how many practicing Sufis were in Jerusalem today. His response was a couple hundred. If East Jerusalem has approximately 300,000 residents and there are roughly 300 Sufis, the percentage of East Jerusalem's population that considers themselves Sufis is 0.1%—a tiny fraction. Later in the discussion, Abu Sway used a vivid metaphor to illustrate the disruptive nature of Israel's settler-colonialism—before 1967, Jerusalem was “a river of Islamic currents.” Muslims came from all over the world seeking the divine. And at any given time, you would find teachers instructing their pupils from all four schools of Islamic law and multiple Sufi apprentices (*myridun*) being trained by their masters. The city was a rich space for encounter and exchange, he opined. But after 1967, “the river of Islamic currents became a stagnant pool.” The occupation was the dam that cut off the exchange of ideas at their source. Muslims stopped coming to Jerusalem, and the occupation became a source of mounting pressure.³⁶⁴ While one couldn't help but wonder if Abu Sway's historical picture was somewhat idealized. The image, nevertheless, evocatively captures the cumulative adverse effect of the occupation.

In this section, I have shown that the acute disruptions of war led to the almost complete elimination of Sufism in Jerusalem. The brotherhoods that survived did so by adapting to the new realities. The Shadhuli, the group that drew from anti-colonial themes, was eliminated,

³⁶⁴ Mustafa Abu Sway, East Jerusalem, Interview April 82, 2016.

and the Qadariyya, the group that took the path of political quietism, was left alone. In each case, their fate was determined by the position they took to the Israeli State.

Al-Bukhari: Allegiance, Authority, and Conversions

In this section, I focus on how Sheikh Abdul-Aziz al-Bukhari emerged as a religious authority and became a proponent of interfaith activism. Al-Bukhari derived his spiritual authority from being a Sheikh within the Sufi Naqshbandi Brotherhood and also through his allegiance to Sheikh Nazim al-Haqqani. He, thus, positioned himself as a conciliatory voice with particular Western resonance. Al-Bukhari also had two 'seeing the light' experiences that gave him license to creatively improvise with his faith tradition. Underlying the following discussion is al-Bukhari's entanglement with the disruptive Israeli settler-colonial state.

Al-Bukhari grew up interacting with people of other faiths. He easily developed friendships with Palestinian Christians since his neighborhood, *Bab Hitta*, was a mixed Muslim and Christian community and because the Zawiyat al-Naqshbandi was located on the Via Dolorosa.³⁶⁵ In youth and young-adulthood, al-Bukhari studied in Turkey with the *Mevlevi* Sufi order and worked in the United States for several years.³⁶⁶ Al-Bukhari became leader of the Zawiya in his early twenties and led it for 37-years until his untimely death on May 31, 2010.³⁶⁷ While al-Bukhari primarily practiced Sufism within the Naqshbandiyya tradition, he also incorporated some elements of the Qadiri and Mevlevi Orders.³⁶⁸ He would have traditionally taken his oath of allegiance (*bai'a*) from his father and predecessor at the Zawiya in Jerusalem, but he chose, instead, to take it from the prominent

³⁶⁵ Gopin, *Bridges Across an Impossible Divide: The Inner Lives of Arab and Jewish Peacemakers*, 79.

³⁶⁶ Chen Bram, "Spirituality under the Shadow of the Conflict: Sufi Circles in Israel," *Israel Studies Review* 29, no. 2 (2014): 129.

³⁶⁷ Shelley Elkayam, "Ambassadors for Peace—in Memoriam: Sheikh Abdul Aziz Bukhari," *Universal Peace Federation* (June 3, 2010), <http://www.upf.org/peace-ambassadors-reports/2877-in-memoriam-sheikh-abdul-aziz-bukhari>.

³⁶⁸ Schwartz, "With the Sufis of Israel."

Naqshbandi leader, Sheikh Nazim al-Haqqani (d. 2014).³⁶⁹ Al-Haqqani was a Turkish Cypriot whose “...teachings reflect a successful adaptation of the Naqshbandi combination of orthodoxy and activism to the era of globalization.”³⁷⁰ Al-Haqqani became an influential figure in the West and preached against the spread of Islamic fundamentalism.³⁷¹ Al-Bukhari’s relationship with Al-Haqqani is, therefore, significant for two reasons: al-Haqqani shaped al-Bukhari’s religious outlook and contributed to his legitimacy as a Sufi religious authority, especially in Western contexts.³⁷² Al-Bukhari, too, positioned himself as a willing participant in the West’s search for moderate Muslims. His ability to deploy his Sufi faith in this way was characteristic of the global transformations of modern Sufism (discussed above) where the boundaries of authority and belonging have blurred.

In the lead-up to the new millennium in 1999, al-Bukhari received a call from a representative of the Vatican in Rome. A Catholic Cardinal was going to usher in the new millennium by praying for the peace of Jerusalem on the Mount of Olives. He wanted al-Bukhari to participate. After he accepted the invitation, al-Bukhari found out that Rabbi David Rosen—a prominent Jewish interfaith advocate—would also be involved. Muslim, Christian, and Jewish leaders would be gathered for the prayer event, and this event had a profound effect on al-Bukhari. Reflecting later, he explains:

And from that day I focused on building relationships between religious leaders, because we all work for God as religious leaders, and I thought it's very important as long as we work for God, we have to do something to help God's wish to be here, and God's wish to live

³⁶⁹ *Bay'a* is the means by which Sufi chain of religious authority (*silsila*) is conferred.

³⁷⁰ Weismann, *The Naqshbandiyya: Orthodoxy and Activism in a Worldwide Sufi Tradition*, 167.

³⁷¹ Geaves, Dressler, and Klinkhammer, *Sufis in Western Society: Global Networking and Locality*, 4. Simon Stjernholm, *Lovers of Muhammad: A Study of Naqshbandi-Haqqani Sufis in the Twenty-First Century* (Lund, Sweden: Centre for Theology and Religious Studies, Lund University, 2011).

³⁷² For a detailed study on religious authority within transnational Sufi networks in the modern world, see: Annabelle Böttcher, "Religious Authority in Transnational Sufi Networks: Shaykh Nazim Al-Qubrusi Al-Haqqani Al-Naqshbandi," in *Speaking for Islam: Religious Authorities in Muslim Societies*, ed. Gudrun Krämer and Sabine Schmidtke (London: Brill, 2006).

*in peace. Because in all religions, God said 'I am the peace,' his name is peace.*³⁷³

The millennium prayer experience, thus, set the course for al-Bukhari's vocational focus. He became convinced that inter-faith activism was an essential task—the true path to peace in a contentious political conflict. This was al-Bukhari's first 'seeing the light' experience.



*Rabbi Eliyahu McLean (Left), Abdul Aziz al-Bukhari (Right).
Photo Credit (Davidson 2010).*

The second happened shortly thereafter. This experience, too, involved a Jewish leader, Rabbi Eliyahu McClean (whom I introduced with the chapter's epigraph). After attending a conference together in Bukhara, Uzbekistan, the two visited the tomb of Imam Bukhari, the place where the Naqshbandi brotherhood originated. They prayed at the tomb, asking for the Imam's blessing. And the experience was life-shaping. Al-Bukhari would later recount, "I know many rabbis. I work with many rabbis. I have good relationships with many rabbis. But I

³⁷³ Because Sheikh al-Bukhari died shortly before my fieldwork in Jerusalem, I was unable to interview him personally. However, because he was an activist and figure of some international interest, a trove of information—essays, articles, videos, interviews, and promotional materials—are available. The two interviews I drew from most extensively for this chapter were: Gopin, *Bridges Across an Impossible Divide: The Inner Lives of Arab and Jewish Peacemakers*; Rachael Kohn, "A Sufi Sheikh in Jerusalem." *The Spirit of Things, ABC* (November 9, 2008), <http://www.abc.net.au/radionational/programs/spiritofthings/a-sufi-sheikh-in-jerusalem/3177390>.

end up working with Eliyahu more than anyone else. I think because of the blessing of the Imam Bukhari.”³⁷⁴ The two were bound together through prayer at the sacred mausoleum. This was their shared ‘seeing the light’ experience. Thomas DeGloma, who titled his incisive work *Seeing the Light: The Social Logic of Personal Discovery*, explains that “individuals tell awakening stories to explain a radical transformation of consciousness, a fundamental change in their perception of their lives and their orientation to the world around them. People tell such stories in order to account for a major change of heart and mind.”³⁷⁵ Conversion experiences, in other words, allow people to narrate personal transformation through the imaginative capacities of religious traditions.³⁷⁶ And al-Bukhari used these two events—the Mount of Olives Millennium prayer and the prayer at Imam al-Bukhari tomb—to creatively establish new meaning structures for his faith. The experience gave him license to improvise with his faith tradition creatively.

Before I discuss these creative improvisations in detail, however, I must explain two points of context, the political context of 1999 and the evolving view of Sufis in Israel. First, the political context. As I explained in Chapter 4, the conflict went through significant transformations in the late 1980s and 1990s. The First *Intifada* added nonviolent resistance to the repertoire of themes, and Oslo Accords, the idea of peace. The Oslo period also showed Palestinians that grassroots peace efforts could help bring about political change. By 1999, however, soaring hopes for a political solution had faded. Sporadic violence and lack of political progress caused many peace activists to become disenchanted. But, the idea of peace remained a viable option within the broader repertoire of themes. Second, within the context of waning interest in peace-activism, a small sector of Israeli

³⁷⁴ Gopin, *Bridges Across an Impossible Divide: The Inner Lives of Arab and Jewish Peacemakers*, 83.

³⁷⁵ Thomas DeGloma, *Seeing the Light: The Social Logic of Personal Discovery* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2014), 2.

³⁷⁶ Penny Edgell, "A Cultural Sociology of Religion: New Directions," *Annual Review of Sociology* 38(2012): 254; Winchester, "Embodying the Faith: Religious Practice and the Making of a Muslim Moral Habitus."

society became interested in Sufism. Chen Bram, who documents the development, noted the establishment of two Sufi orders in Israel, the Path of Abraham (*tariqa ibrahimiyya*) and a small group of *Mevlevi*.³⁷⁷ Israel had begun looking for a new way to engage with Muslims. And Bram suggested that “the growth of interest in Sufism in popular [Israeli] media during this period was facilitated by a search for an ‘alternative’ Islam and for a new basis from which Jews and Muslims might relate to one another.”³⁷⁸ Regarding this chapter’s objective, therefore, what was happening was that Israel had begun to shift its narrative about Sufis to serve its interests. I argued earlier that Sufis in Palestine had been construed historically as anti-modern and anti-Western—even terrorists. Now Israel had begun to refashion them as the ‘good’ Muslims.

In this section, I have shown that Sheikh al-Bukhari’s religious authority was linked to his leadership in the Naqshbandi brotherhood and his allegiance to Sheikh Nazim al-Haqqani. From the start, al-Bukhari positioned himself as a moderate Muslim voice that was conciliatory with the West. I have also shown how the political and social contexts of his conversions were critical and developed coterminously with his ‘seeing the light’ experiences. These dynamics—al-Bukhari’s authority, allegiance, and conversations—gave him license to creatively improvise with his faith tradition. And lingering in the background has been al-Bukhari’s entanglement with the disruptive Israeli settler-colonial state. Now the content of his ritual improvisations.

The Resonance of Ritual Improvisations

In this section, I explain the specific ways al-Bukhari mobilized support for inter-faith reconciliation through relational, discursive, and ritual improvisations. I take each form in turn, giving particular attention to the Sufi practice of *dhikr*. I aim primarily to highlight the resonance of

³⁷⁷ Bram, "Spirituality under the Shadow of the Conflict: Sufi Circles in Israel," 130-31. For a detailed study on The Path of Abraham see the work of Yafiah Katherine Randall, *Sufism and Jewish-Muslim Relations: The Derekh Avraham Order in Israel* (London: Routledge, 2016); "Loving the 'Enemy': An Alternative Narrative on Jewish-Muslim Relations," in *Controversies in Contemporary Religions, Volume 3: Issues in Traditions and Case Studies*, ed. Paul Hedges (Santa Barbara, CA: Praeger, 2014).

³⁷⁸ Bram, "Spirituality under the Shadow of the Conflict: Sufi Circles in Israel," 123.

these improvisations. Readers will recall that rituals connect people to the larger meaning structures of their lives and that faith is constituted through bodily practice. This is precisely what is occurring in this section—al-Bukhari is taking the abstract idea that peace was possible and creating buy-in for it through participation in improvised religious rituals.

First, al-Bukhari improvised relationally. He encouraged Muslims and Jews to build relationships through shared experiences. These improvisations drew directly from the repertoire of themes discussed above. Al-Bukhari always included people of other faiths in his public appearances. His reasoning was simple—he had to model what he preached.³⁷⁹ Building peace started by being an example for people to follow. Likewise, al-Bukhari brought people of different faiths together, creating space for them to speak, interact, and form relationships. He explains:

Although we live in the same countries...we don't have that relationship, we don't talk to each other. So we bring Arabs and Jews in meetings and we let them talk to each other, getting to know each other. Building that trust that we are all equal in this world, and you can't judge somebody by his religion or his title. You have to judge him for his own personality, and that's how we work together with Jerusalem Peacemakers...³⁸⁰

Jerusalem Peacemakers (known today as *Abrahamic Reunion*) is a non-profit peace organization he and his associates Eliyahu McLean and Haj Ibrahim Abu el-Hawa founded together in 2004.³⁸¹ And as the title conveys, *Jerusalem Peacemakers* exists to promote peace between

³⁷⁹ Gopin, *Bridges Across an Impossible Divide: The Inner Lives of Arab and Jewish Peacemakers*, 85.

³⁸⁰ *Bridges Across an Impossible Divide: The Inner Lives of Arab and Jewish Peacemakers*, 82.

³⁸¹ Abrahamic Reunion, "Abrahamic Reunion," <https://www.abrahamicreunion.org/>.

members of the three Abrahamic faith traditions in Jerusalem.³⁸² The group has sponsored multiple events and initiatives. Since 2007, for example, *Jerusalem Peacemakers*, along with the *Lovers of Jerusalem*, has co-sponsored *The Jerusalem Hug*, an event gathering Muslims and Jews (and anyone wanting to be involved) to form a large circle around Jerusalem's Old City and do just that—give it a hug.³⁸³ Al-Bukhari was also a sponsor of the *Sulha Peace Project*, an initiative bringing together Muslims and Jews for monthly ‘Tribal Fires’ to sing, dance, and share with one another. The group hosted youth gatherings called *Sulhita* for overnight retreats. They also had a gathering called ‘The Tent of Sarah and Hagar’ for women of different faith traditions to discuss various issues.³⁸⁴ While these activities have continued in al-Bukhari’s absence, they were the primary framework through which al-Bukhari enabled people to form inter-faith relationships, and they were the first element of his improvisations. They connected the idea of peace to physical bodily practices.

Discursively, al-Bukhari linked his peace commitments to Sufism and the peaceful nature of the Abrahamic religions: “In the Sufi tradition we don’t believe in violence, we don’t believe in aggression. We believe in peace and harmony.”³⁸⁵ He included other religions in this view, arguing that all the Abrahamic faiths were like this:

The religions of Abraham are 97 percent peaceful and 3 percent violent, the 3 percent perverted and used by extremists. All the three religions talk about peace and love and harmony and living together in peace. Three percent is violence, but unfortunately we are holding

³⁸² From their website: “The Abrahamic Reunion is a team of religious & spiritual leaders – men, women, Jewish, Muslim, Christian, & Druze – dedicated to uplifting human consciousness and building peace in the Holy Land by opening hearts to the love and wisdom of all spiritual traditions... The Abrahamic Reunion seeks to be a living example of our values and beliefs; to find and support other spiritual peace makers and organizations; to provide training for those interested in spiritual peacemaking; and to create and implement interfaith programs, celebrations, youth activities and other educational initiatives.” *Ibid.* About Us.

³⁸³ Jerusalem Hug, “Jerusalem Hug,” <http://jerusalemhug.org/about-us.html>; Gopin, *Bridges Across an Impossible Divide: The Inner Lives of Arab and Jewish Peacemakers*, 71.

³⁸⁴ Gopin, *Bridges Across an Impossible Divide: The Inner Lives of Arab and Jewish Peacemakers*, 57; Sulha Peace Project, “Sulha Peace Project,” <http://www.sulha.com/>.

³⁸⁵ *Bridges Across an Impossible Divide: The Inner Lives of Arab and Jewish Peacemakers*, 80.

to the 3 percent and forgetting about the rest. God says in his Holy Book killing one person is like killing the whole world, saving one person is like saving the whole world. That teaches us that God wants people to live together in peace and harmony.³⁸⁶

Here, al-Bukhari deliberately downplays religious difference and emphasizes shared faith commitments to peace and unity. The comment also revealed his moderate views and his vocal stance against religious extremism, which relates to the previous discussion about his positioning as a moderate and conciliatory voice to the West.

Al-Bukhari also creatively interprets religious stories common to the three faith traditions for his peace purposes. The technique comes out clearly in his discussion of the Muslim holiday *'Eid al-Adha* which commemorates Abraham's willingness to sacrifice his son, Ishmael:

Now let's not say which son it is because it doesn't make a difference which son. But the point is when God told Ibrahim something, he said, 'Yes, my Lord.' And when the father told his son, 'I'm going to slaughter your neck,' he said, 'Do what God wants you to do.' Obeying, answering, respecting the word of God, no matter how much.³⁸⁷

Al-Bukhari refuses to mention the son's name precisely because his identity is disputed: to Muslims it was Ishmael, to Jews and Christians it was Isaac.³⁸⁸ He deliberately downplays religious difference. All three faith traditions value obedience and see it as a foundational element of a faith commitment and, thus, he would prefer to emphasize the father and son's willing obedience. The discursive tactic blurs the lines between faith traditions: it is a deliberate improvisation to create an open trajectory for inter-faith reconciliation. Additionally, when al-Bukhari claims that Sufism is primarily about peace, he is obfuscating substantial elements of the Sufi tradition and its history. Historically, some Sufis were active proponents of violence and participants in

³⁸⁶ *Ibid.* The Holy book he is referencing is the Qur'an, al-Ma'ida 5:32.

³⁸⁷ *Bridges Across an Impossible Divide: The Inner Lives of Arab and Jewish Peacemakers*, 98.

³⁸⁸ While Ishmael is widely understood as the son among contemporary Muslims, the identity of Abraham's son has been a matter of extensive historical debate, with earlier sources claiming that the son was Isaac. For details, see Reuven Firestone, *Journeys in Holy Lands: The Evolution of the Abraham-Ishmael Legends in Islamic Exegesis* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1990).

militant groups. Take, for example, Saladin's violent expulsion of the Crusaders. He and his soldiers considered themselves Sufis, and they embraced violence. Or for a more recent case involving the Naqshbandi directly, in the 1830s and 1840s during the anti-colonial and national struggles in Chechnia and Daghestan, the Naqshbandi actively used violence.³⁸⁹ Al-Bukhari's dismissal of violence—labeling it extremism—conceals critical aspects of Sufi tradition and history. By claiming that Sufis “don't believe in violence,” al-Bukhari is improvising with religious discourse to create buy-in for his vision of interfaith activism.

Al-Bukhari's ideas on sacred space were also discursive improvisations. Take his attitude toward the Haram al-Sharif as a case in point. When asked during a radio interview to comment on other Muslim leaders' claims that Jews had no historical connection to the Temple Mount, his response was telling:

The place is not relevant to the worshipping, [sic] because God says 'I gave you the whole earth to worship me on it.' ... If we are really sincere about God, our holy places are the same because our father is the same. Our prophets are the same, our God is the same. So the holy places, belong to God, not to us... I remember during the Crusader period from what I read that they have the Dome of the Rock changed to a church, and later Saladin came and changed it to a mosque. So the building remained as it is, the title changed, but the worshipping is never changed, as long as you are sincere of worshipping God... But if we really are wise and understanding, the places where God wants us to worship is the whole world, anywhere in the world you can. If the mosque was here or there, or the Temple was here or there, this is our own issue, but God says anywhere you pray, I'll accept it. I accept it, so let's not pinpoint issues that make complications. Let's make peace...³⁹⁰

Here, al-Bukhari takes minimizing religious difference to a whole new level. He reasons that God is one and God's prophets are the same—why should differences be made? While he may have sidestepped the issue of Temple Mount denial, he has stepped into a quagmire of *a priori* assumptions; about God, God's nature, the prophets, and sacred places. His response is conspicuously reductionist and dismissive

³⁸⁹ Moshe Gammer, *Muslim Resistance to the Tsar: Shamil and the Conquest of Chechnia and Daghestan* (London: Frank Cass, 1994), 39-46.

³⁹⁰ Kohn, "A Sufi Sheikh in Jerusalem."

toward sensitive religious issues. Effectively, his strategy for building peace is changing the subject—*“let’s not pinpoint issues that make complications. Let’s make peace.”* He is saying, in effect, that the way to make peace is to avoid challenging problems. And his logic begs the question: are not contentious issues precisely the places where peace-work should be focused if progress is to be made? The subject-change trick, therefore, is a discursive improvisation with little meaningful force. But before I further digress into the discord of al-Bukhari’s improvisations, the critical point I am making here is that even while his improvisations may have been substantively thin, some people were drawn to them. They found an appeal to his vision and resonated with the idea that peace could be made through religious traditions.

Al-Bukhari’s third and most important strategy for peace-building was through improvised religious rituals. Since this material comes to the core of my argument, I examine two specific and overlapping contexts where al-Bukhari used ritual improvisational strategically: shared participation in religious holidays and Sufi *dhikr*. First, al-Bukhari encouraged inter-faith participation in religious holidays. His words capture the spirit of his conviction:

You know God made holidays, holiday [sic] is to share and to be happy and celebrate. So when the holidays [of Islam, Judaism, and Christianity] are so close to each other we all are in the same spirit of happiness and cheerful. And I think this is one of the best occasions for both nations who live in the same land to be happy, and to share for the holiday, and to have some kind of optimistic feeling that God brought the holidays so we should be happy about what God gives us.³⁹¹

In Chapter 1, I observed that religious holidays are often a source of contention in Jerusalem, particularly when they overlap. The observation provides the contrast for why al-Bukhari’s words are striking: he saw the disruptive potential of their overlap as an opportunity to cultivate happiness. He and his inter-faith colleagues brought Jews to Ramadan *iftars*, and Muslims to Hanukah celebrations and Shabbat meals. Eliyahu McLean recounts bringing right-wing Israeli skeptics to Shabbat meals with al-Bukhari: “Sheikh Bukhari... is a portal for many

³⁹¹ Gopin, *Bridges Across an Impossible Divide: The Inner Lives of Arab and Jewish Peacemakers*, 97-98.

Israeli people who have never met a Muslim and a religious Muslim...he is so sweet, and he is so likable, something shifts in them and their hearts open.”³⁹² Al-Bukhari also hosted inter-faith Shabbat meals and Ramadan *iftars* in his home at the Zawiyat al-Naqshbandi.³⁹³ These activities helped forge links between his commitment to inter-faith activism and public perceptions of the Naqshbandi in Jerusalem.

The Sufi *dhikr* was an integral part of al-Bukhari’s vision. As discussed above, *dhikr* is practiced ubiquitously by Sufis and is broadly understood as the recollection of God. I also observed that various Brotherhoods practice the ritual with different forms and content. Two examples illustrate al-Bukhari’s improvisational use of *dhikr*. First, at interfaith gatherings—whether during shared religious holidays or during other inter-faith initiatives—al-Bukhari and his partners would include a time of *dhikr* as part of the experience. Space would be cleared for people to stand in a circle while leaders invited people to join in by holding hands. The circle would then slowly move clock-wise as people chanted “*Shalom, Salam, Hu, Hu,*” repeating the phrase as they moved. As people joined, the ritual would continue. The *dhikr* would then continue for various lengths of time. It might last a few minutes, up to half-an-hour, or even longer. Each *dhikr* would always be slightly different, and participants would follow al-Bukhari’s lead. The intensity and speed would ebb and flow as they chanted—“*Shalom, Salam, Hu, Hu.*” The picture below is a snapshot from one such *dhikr*, illustrating the practice vividly.

³⁹² *Bridges Across an Impossible Divide: The Inner Lives of Arab and Jewish Peacemakers*, 73.

³⁹³ Bram, "Spirituality under the Shadow of the Conflict: Sufi Circles in Israel," 129.



Al-Bukhari (center) and McLean (right) leading inter-faith dhikr. Notice the covered women, the man with the cross around his neck, and the flags with “peace” written in multiple languages hanging above them. Photo Credit: (ZejMedia 2010).

This *dhikr* was patently improvisational, designed specifically to create a shared religious experience for participants of different faith traditions. I must make two comments about the precise content of al-Bukhari’s *dhikr* improvisation. First, al-Bukhari modified Naqshbandiyya *dhikr* by making it vocal. Readers will recall that silent *dhikr* was the distinguishing element of Naqshbandi Sufi tradition. Sheikh Jami, one early Naqshbandi leader, defined the ideal practitioner of *dhikr* as having, “the ability to engage in *dhikr* in such a manner that one seated next to him might be completely unaware of his state.”³⁹⁴ Jami’s assessment shows how far al-Bukhari has taken creative license with his tradition: he performs *dhikr* vocally, standing with conspicuous bodily movement in a mixed group of Muslims and Jews. His *dhikr* is deliberately noticeable. Second, the vocal formula is another modification. Recall that remembrance of the divine essence (*ism al-dhat, Allah*) or the recitation of the *shahada*, ‘There is no god but God,’ were cornerstones of Naqshbandiyya *dhikr*. Al-Bukhari and his fellow participants were chanting “*Shalom, Salam, Hu, Hu.*” The first two elements of the formula mean ‘peace’ in Hebrew and Arabic. These utterances have no precedence within the Naqshbandi *dhikr* tradition (or any other Sufi tradition as far as I am aware). Here, al-Bukhari has taken great liberty with his improvisations. The final “*Hu, Hu,*” however, is more conventional. *Hu* is the third-person masculine singular

³⁹⁴ Algar, "Silent and Vocal Dhikr in the Naqshbandi Order," 44.

pronoun in Arabic meaning 'he,' and it is a direct reference to God.³⁹⁵ *Hu* is also the last letter of the Arabic name for God, *Allah*. This expression is the typical climax of vocal Sufi *dhikr*. And in al-Bukhari's case, this element is the most intelligible expression of Sufism. But even with this conventional Sufi element, a resonance of improvisation can be detected. For Jews, directly uttering the name of God is forbidden. Such an utterance may constitute taking God's name in vain and is expressly forbidden. Referring to God indirectly through pronouns, however, is permitted. Al-Bukhari's use of *Hu* could also be understood as a strategic accommodation for Jewish participants. Al-Bukhari used *dhikr* to invite Muslims and Jews to join his vision of inter-faith reconciliation. The ritual—by linking the cognitive idea that inter-faith reconciliation was possible to the physical activity of the religious ritual—allowed people to develop the faith that peace was possible. Al-Bukhari improvised a religious ritual with inter-faith resonance.

In the second example, *dhikr* was not only a shared religious ritual but a tactical means of defusing a tense situation. In a session of the World Conference of Imams and Rabbis for Peace in Seville, Spain, Imams from Gaza were sharing about the humanitarian crisis in the Strip and Jewish Rabbis felt attacked. The conference organizer nudged al-Bukhari and McLean, 'You need to organize a prayer of the heart.' So al-Bukhari pulled aside Sheikh Abdul Karim al-Zurba, an Imam from the Dome of the Rock, and encouraged him to start singing Sufi songs and reciting beautiful chapters of the Qur'an. Several Rabbis who spoke Arabic joined in and, eventually, everyone participated.

McLean later explained what happened:

So then all of the rabbis sat down, and what unfolded for the next four hours was a chanting from the mystical and spiritual traditions of both communities and a connection from the heart. And this sharing of spirituality, of prayer, transformed the heart connection so that the next day they could then speak about all the other issues, and work on the more difficult political and humanitarian issues that were

³⁹⁵ *Hu* is technically only the first syllable of the Arabic word; the full word is *huwa*. In the Qur'an, for example, God is referred to as *huwa*. See, *ayat al-kursi*, Surah 2:255.

coming between the people there. And that was all behind the scenes work of me and Sheikh al-Bukhari. ³⁹⁶

The form of *dhikr* in this example was different than the first, but it was no less improvisational. This time *dhikr* was used deliberately to defuse a tense situation. Al-Bukhari and McLean understood—either explicitly or intuitively—that the ritual could create a meaningful and transformative experience for both Muslims and Jews in the group. Since rituals have the powerful constitutive force to forge links between people’s bodies and beliefs, ritual improvisations became a tactical method for fostering people’s personal transformation and their buy-in for the vision of peace, even if only in that particular conference setting.

I now turn to *Nabi Musa* outside Jericho. The first *Nabi Musa* event was the seminal experience where shared religious rituals became a defining element in al-Bukhari’s peace activism. It was the most improvisational, imaginative, and powerful ritual he engaged in. First, as I previously observed, the meaning and significance of religious rituals are amplified when performed in sacred spaces. The amplified significance plays a critical role in the *Nabi Musa* experience. This chapter’s epigraph was an excerpt from Eliyahu McLean’s account of the experience. Here is his account in full:

*The first event that we [Sheikh Bukhari and I] organized was at this place called Nabi Musa, the tomb of the prophet Moses near Jericho. We organized a gathering at an Islamic holy place in the desert with over a hundred people... without preparing for it, without really organizing for it, we said let’s do a dhikr in Nabi Musa... on the roof, they had a big space, and it was a clear night. You could see the beautiful stars and the moon, and we sat there and we meditated for hours, and you can feel the real spirit; it was like we are sitting in Heaven. That moment left a very strong impact in our hearts, that we should do that more. That we should take the children of Abraham who pray to the same God and to feel that we are a unity and we are binded [sic] by the reality that we all worship the same God.*³⁹⁷

McLean’s words reveal that the *Nabi Musa* experience was formative, profound, and improvisational. Abdul-Aziz, likewise, recounted the

³⁹⁶ Gopin, *Bridges Across an Impossible Divide: The Inner Lives of Arab and Jewish Peacemakers*, 71.

³⁹⁷ *Bridges Across an Impossible Divide: The Inner Lives of Arab and Jewish Peacemakers*, 68.

event with great enthusiasm: "...There was something very beautiful because it just happened without really preparing for it."³⁹⁸ The improvisational spontaneity doubtless contributed to the authenticity and power of their experience. What they might—or might not—have realized was that their improvisation drew from a preexisting repertoire of themes.

Nabi Musa, as I observed in Chapter 4, has a significant place in the lexicon of Palestinian history, rituals, and nationalism. Saladin commissioned the *maqam* as an Islamic endowment (*waqf*) in the twelfth century shortly after retaking Jerusalem. In the Ottoman period, the al-Husseini clan held patronage over the sacred site, and Hajj Amin al-Husseini, the Grand Mufti of Jerusalem, repurposed the annual ritual-procession to be a symbol of Palestinian nationalism with both Muslim and Christian participation. Tawfiq Canaan, the British Mandate-era ethnographer, detailed the annual processional in his book *Mohammedan Saints and Sanctuaries in Palestine*. One aspect of his account was beyond my purposes in Chapter 4, but here it is particularly relevant: Canaan noted that after the processional arrived at *Nabi Musa*, people performed Sufi *dhikr* at the site:

Nor should we pass over the religious observances of these days. As soon as the muaddin calls to prayer most of the people answer the call. It is all the same where they pray: in the *maqam*, *djami*, a room, or outside in a tent. From time to time a *dikr* is held. A *seh* [sic, sheikh] with a good voice recites part of the Qoran [Qu'ran] in a melodious chant. All present keep absolutely quiet; no talking, smoking or coffee-drinking is allowed. I once attended such a *dikr* at *Nabi Musa* and found it quite edifying to see how devotionally all listened.³⁹⁹

Although the processional had taken on nationalistic overtones, the ritual retained its religious significance. Notice that when *dhikr* was held, everyone was silent, engaged. The symbolic properties of rituals were in full operation. To some, the ritual was an orthodox Islamic practice; to others, it may have been primarily about the Sufi devotional practice; to others still, participation could have been an enactment of a

³⁹⁸ *Bridges Across an Impossible Divide: The Inner Lives of Arab and Jewish Peacemakers*, 85.

³⁹⁹ Canaan, *Mohammedan Saints and Sanctuaries in Palestine*, 209.

national symbol. In each case, the ritual displayed the properties of condensation of meaning, multivocality, and ambiguity. The ritual's symbolic power drew these elements together, enabling the ritual to become meaningful for participants.

When al-Bukhari and McLean performed their Sufi *dhikr* at the site years later, the ritual was no less powerful symbolically. But the ritual's meaning and significance were reconfigured almost entirely. The nationalism of the previous generation was gone, and the ritual was linked to a different political project. Al-Bukhari and McLean's purpose was to bring Muslims and Jews together for inter-faith reconciliation. Like al-Bukhari's other *dhikr* practices, the *Nabi Musa* experience involved people in the ideological project of peace and reconciliation *vis-à-vis* religious practice. The two blurred the boundaries of ethnic identities by improvising religious rituals for their niche, peace-making purposes. In another sense, however, this project was similar to what Hajj Amin al-Husseini had done previously. He had drawn on the syncretism of Muslim and Christian ritual life in the city to create a new national solidarity. Al-Bukhari and McLean improvised with the same historical repertoire of themes but toward a different end. They drew from the mixed, hybrid, and shared religious engagement from Jerusalem's history to actualize their new religious vision. Al-Husseini had done it with Muslims and Christians; Al-Bukhari and McLean, with Muslims and Jews. In both cases, the efforts had a particular effect because the symbolic power of the rituals had been amplified through being performed in sacred space. Thus, al-Bukhari and McLean creatively drew from the broad repertoire of themes to perform their imaginative and powerful religious improvisation.

The *Nabi Musa* experience had such an effect that al-Bukhari and McLean began taking groups to the site regularly. The one-time religious improvisation became a repetitive and socially standardized ritual itself. They started taking people to other sacred sites, too. They brought groups to the tomb of *Nabi Samuel*, for example. Between Ramallah and Jerusalem, the tomb is a significant sacred space for both

Muslims and Jews.⁴⁰⁰ While the two communities had worshiped at the same sacred space for centuries, the site had never been used for inter-faith Sufi *dhikr*.

In conclusion, I have shown that al-Bukhari drew on the power of improvised religious rituals to create buy-in for his vision of peace. Improvisations were relational, discursive, and—most importantly—constituted through ritual. They allowed people to develop a belief in religious reconciliation they linked the cognitive and physical dimensions of faith. But beyond the resonance within his immediate sphere of influence, al-Bukhari's improvised religious rituals were unable to generate much resonance.

The Improvisational Effect: Dissonance

While al-Bukhari's improvised rituals resonated with some, his ability to build peace in his community was severely limited—the improvisations were simply too politically and religiously discordant.

Speaking shortly after the 2008-2009 Gaza War, when 1,417

Palestinians had been killed, al-Bukhari explains:⁴⁰¹

Peace work is getting harder every day because, of course, there is a new development and new happenings, like now situation [sic] in Gaza. People call me on the phone, and they say, "You see we told you, peace will not work. Only violence will work"... With this happening [the assault on Gaza] nobody can accept the idea of peace, because this is absolutely the opposite way of peace, and we are trying to help a peace initiative, and they destroy everything we've done. And Hamas has become more strong, more popular, more supported... We're not going to stop working for peace, for sure. But my work is going to be a lot more difficult, to convince people to sit around for dialogue and convince them that only peace will solve the problem. Most people now are very edgy. You can't

⁴⁰⁰ For further detail on the history of the Tomb of Nabi Samuel as a shared sacred space, see: Mahmoud Yazbak, "Holy Shrines (Maqamat) in Modern Palestine/Israel," in *Holy Places in the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict*, ed. Marshall J. Breger, Yitzhak Reiter, and Leonard Hammer (London: Routledge, 2009), 237-38.

⁴⁰¹ *Journal of Palestine Studies*, "Palestinian Casualties by Status and Region," *Journal of Palestine Studies* 38, no. 3 (2009).

*even talk to anybody about peace. They all look at you and are like, "Open your eyes, don't you see what's happening in Gaza?"*⁴⁰²

Al-Bukhari's words come across as a sober mix of determination and despair. Unsurprisingly, the most optimistic research-based assessments for peace-activism show that the impact is limited.⁴⁰³ They simply fall short of accomplishing their ambitious objectives. Researchers have, however, identified a qualified effectiveness for peace activism by distinguishing between macro- and micro-impacts: macro-impact being the effect of the initiatives on the conflict as a whole, micro-impact being the initiatives' influence on individuals within specific social sectors.⁴⁰⁴ Peace initiatives only influence the later. Research has also shown that peace education programs are more effective at addressing periphery issues rather than core values. Salomon explains, "Peace education programs succeed to affect mainly more peripheral beliefs which are more easily changeable, less consequential and have a far weaker connection to actual behavior."⁴⁰⁵ Chen Bram, explicitly addressing the peace initiatives of Sufis, gives the following account:

Indeed, providing hope and gathering together people from different religious backgrounds has its own value, but its influence on promoting peace or bridging Palestinian-Jewish relations is questionable. As for relations between Jewish and Arab citizens inside Israel, the focus on religious encounters can be criticized for sidelining discussion of more concrete political issues such as inequality in state resources and services to citizens.⁴⁰⁶

⁴⁰² I have omitted parts of the monologue where al-Bukhari repeats himself, otherwise no editorial revisions have been made. Any editorial or grammatical mistakes are as they were found in Gopin, *Bridges Across an Impossible Divide: The Inner Lives of Arab and Jewish Peacemakers*, 91-94.

⁴⁰³ Mohammed Abu-Nimer, *Dialogue, Conflict Resolution, and Change: Arab-Jewish Encounters in Israel* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1999).

⁴⁰⁴ Miles Hewstone, "Contact and Categorization: Social-Psychological Interventions to Change Inter-Group Relations," in *Foundations of Stereotypes and Stereotyping*, ed. C. Neil Macrae, Charles Stangor, and Miles Hewstone (New York: Guilford Press, 1996).

⁴⁰⁵ Gavriel Salomon, "Does Peace Education Really Make a Difference?" *Peace and Conflict: Journal of Peace Psychology* 12, no. 1 (2004): 10.

⁴⁰⁶ Bram, "Spirituality under the Shadow of the Conflict: Sufi Circles in Israel," 126.

Indeed, the effectiveness of al-Bukhari's inter-faith initiatives has been limited to micro-impacts within small sectors of Israeli and Palestinian societies. Peace initiatives appeal to those who have a natural inclination toward peace, not those opposed to it. Skeptics are rarely converted, and as a result, the impact of the initiatives will remain limited.

Returning to the broader context, Mustafa Abu Sway speaks forcefully to Bram's point about peace initiatives sidelining significant political issues:

They [Jerusalemites] don't think much of this [Inter-faith efforts]. It's a way of whitewashing the ugliness of the occupation. There are many people on both sides who want an end to the occupation, but the interfaith dialogue is a very shy enterprise. They are not talking with decision makers. Politicians do their business without religious people throughout the year. Maybe there's a picture once a year for public perception. But I don't see much inclusion on either side... People basically do not trust. The BDS [Boycott Divestment and Sanction movement] has grown in the last few years. People will not tolerate these things the way they did 20-years-ago when there was a glimpse of hope.⁴⁰⁷

Abu Sway's comment adroitly speaks to the situation in Jerusalem and why al-Bukhari's improvisations would cause dissonance. The whitewashing he refers to is ignoring the unpleasant fact of occupation—that Israel remains the occupier, absorbing Palestinian land for settlement expansion. Israel simply has no intention of withdrawing from the occupation. Advocating for peace within the existing structure and asymmetrical power imbalance is to undermine the legitimacy of Palestinian grievances.⁴⁰⁸ Moreover, while peace activists are free to make assertions about the importance of co-existence and peace, they are disconnected from decision-makers who work formally to advocate for the interests of their constituents. Palestinian political leaders, thus, see the efforts of inter-faith peace activists as irrelevant and out of touch. Furthermore, al-Bukhari's own attitude undermines the potential for partnership with politicians—"...so my political view was [sic] all

⁴⁰⁷ Personal Interview, East Jerusalem, April 28, 2016.

⁴⁰⁸ "Spirituality under the Shadow of the Conflict: Sufi Circles in Israel," 126-27.

politicians are fake because they never do what they say.”⁴⁰⁹ Thus, when the extent of cooperation between religious and political leaders is an annual photo-op mentioned above, the partnership can barely be called superficial. It is merely public pretense.

Abu Sway’s comment also brings another dynamic of dissonance to the fore, the evolving political context. While peace activism had been fashionable in the Oslo period, the peace theme had been silenced by derision. After Palestinians realized that few tangible benefits would come from the Oslo Accords, they felt they had been duped by the discourse of peace. The discourse of peace had been another way for Israel to sell its occupation and settler-colonial project to the world. As time passed in the failing Oslo process, Palestinians continued to lose their homes and land. The ‘glimpse of hope’ Abu Sway referred to has completely disappeared today. As the theme of peace receded, Palestinians returned to the theme of resistance. The Boycott Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) movement gained momentum. Cooperation with Israel came to be seen as normalization (*tatbiy*). According to Walid Salem, normalization is “the process of building open and reciprocal relations with Israel in all fields, including the political economic, social, cultural, educational, legal, and security fields.”⁴¹⁰ This broad Palestinian shift from peace to resistance explains why al-Bukhari’s willing participation with Israelis was so problematic. He was seen as a normalizer, and his initiatives were dissonant with the prevailing approach to the occupation. Palestinians perceived al-Bukhari’s efforts as inadvertently engendering the “weakening [of] shared Palestinian identity.”⁴¹¹ This is the discord al-Bukhari’s improvisations created in the political field.

When it came to the specific discursive and participatory elements of his religious improvisations, al-Bukhari only amplified the

⁴⁰⁹ Gopin, *Bridges Across an Impossible Divide: The Inner Lives of Arab and Jewish Peacemakers*, 80.

⁴¹⁰ Walid Salem, "The Anti-Normalization Discourse in the Context of Israeli-Palestinian Peace-Building," *Palestine-Israel Journal of Politics, Economics and Culture* 12, no. 1 (2005).

⁴¹¹ Bram, "Spirituality under the Shadow of the Conflict: Sufi Circles in Israel," 126.

discord. He minimized religious difference discursively, claiming that Muslims and Jews had identical understandings of God, prophets, and sacred spaces. He improvised with peace when the theme with resonance was resistance. As al-Bukhari himself noted, Hamas had gained support during the 2008-2009 Gaza War. One reason they did so was because they used religious discourse to amplify the religious boundary markers of 'us' versus 'our enemy.' The movement framed its violent resistance toward Israel religiously, arguing that Islam called for an aggressive response to Israel's aggression.⁴¹² Hamas, thus drew from the violent discursive resources in the broader repertoire of themes (Chapter 4) while al-Bukhari did the opposite. His improvisations with peace were a shrilling discord.

Al-Bukhari was also criticized for the participatory dimensions of his improvised religious rituals. Some claimed that by including Jews in Muslim rituals, he was committing heresy (*bid'a*). He was accused of being a Freemason and a Baha'i.⁴¹³ Al-Bukhari was a regular object of slander and scandalous accusation within his own community. Bram explains that even his Uzbek origin was used against him:

Al-Bukhari's identity added to this sensitivity; he was Sufi and stressed his Uzbek ancestry—hence he was 'not quite Palestinian.' This identity symbolically allowed him to develop relations with Jewish activists and Jewish organizations, but at the same time it demonstrates the even more problematic nature of relating to him as a representative of the local Muslim population.⁴¹⁴

Al-Bukhari was regularly harassed and occasionally received death-threats for his activism.⁴¹⁵ When he died in 2010, rumors circulated that the cause was poisoning, not a heart attack as his family claimed.⁴¹⁶ It

⁴¹² If this study's focus were Hamas' use of religious discourse, I would argue that they, too, were improvising with their position on violence. Several studies have analyzed Hamas' tactical deployment of violence. See, for example: Glenn E. Robinson, "Hamas as Social Movement," in *Islamic Activism: A Social Movement Theory Approach*, ed. Quintan Wiktorowicz (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2004).

⁴¹³ Schwartz, "With the Sufis of Israel."

⁴¹⁴ Bram, "Spirituality under the Shadow of the Conflict: Sufi Circles in Israel," 129.

⁴¹⁵ Randall, *Sufism and Jewish-Muslim Relations: The Derekh Avraham Order in Israel*, 134.

⁴¹⁶ For a detailed account of the rumors of al-Bukhari's assassination, see: Bram, "Spirituality under the Shadow of the Conflict: Sufi Circles in Israel," 130, 136n14.

would not have been the first time a Palestinian leader was assassinated for suggesting that there could be some form of settlement between Palestinians and Israelis.⁴¹⁷ While al-Bukhari's real cause of death will likely remain shrouded in mystery, it is all too clear that his improvised religious rituals were deeply discordant among most of his fellow Palestinians. They were both out-of-sync with popular sentiment and too unorthodox to be palatable at any significant scale.

Conclusion: the Paradox of Patronage

Initially, my fieldwork on the Naqshbandi in Jerusalem was challenging. Aside from al-Bukhari's untimely death before my arrival, Palestinians gave me strange looks whenever I inquired. They often turned my questions back on me—*Are there Sufis in Jerusalem? Who are the Naqshbandi again? Muslims and Jews perform dhikr together—what!?!⁴¹⁸* I soon realized that people's knowledge of the Naqshbandi was often connected to their familiarity with the Old City. Those with weak ties knew little about the group. They had occasionally heard of al-Bukhari, but little more. Some community leaders had neither heard of al-Bukhari nor the Zawiya. People with close ties to the Old City, however, were more knowledgeable. They associated the Naqshbandi with Sheikh al-Bukhari: they spoke of the tragedy of his death, the Naqshbandi's hospitality to visitors, their Ramadan *iftars*, and their special celebrations. I had the sense that people generally viewed them positively. But when Old City residents knew about the inter-faith activism or shared religious rituals, their views were mixed. People's ambivalence was related to their cynicism about peace-activism or al-Bukhari's audacious claims about Islam and Sufism.

After I figured out why my interlocutors kept putting questions back to me, I continued to wonder: why was there so much information about the group—news article, interviews, and Facebook groups? I

⁴¹⁷ To cite one example, Aziz Shehadeh. For details, see: Raja Shehadeh, *Strangers in the House: Coming of Age in Occupied Palestine* (South Royalton, VT: Steerforth Press, 2003).

⁴¹⁸ One astute interlocutor pointed out that the inter-faith groups were not well known by Jews either.

finally realized that the information had primarily been aimed at people like me, curious internationals drawn to the idea of peace. As I paid more attention, I noted that inter-faith Shabbat meals and *dhikr* services, for example, were regularly sprinkled with internationals. Also, why had I not noticed that all the material I collected about the Naqshbandi was in English? Chen Bram corroborated my observation by pointing out that organizations like *Jerusalem Peacemakers* were designed and marketed specifically for Western audiences.⁴¹⁹

As I have discussed several times in this chapter, Sufis and Sufism are drawn into the realm of state politics through the production of knowledge that advances specific political purposes. In this case, whether aiming at an Israeli or Western audience, knowledge about Sufism made a significant shift. Previously, Sufis had been charlatans, magicians, and even terrorists; but since the late 1990s, portraying them as ‘good Muslims’ or an ‘alternative’ Islam became politically expedient for Israelis and their western backers. And what should be evident now is that this shift had an insidious political twist. With each ‘good’ Muslim comment, there was an underhanded jab at all the other ‘bad’ Muslims —if only we (Israelis and Westerners) could find enough ‘good’ Muslims, the conflict would be solved. That is how the logic went. The only problem was that the framing completely overlooked the political power imbalances and Israel’s disruptions of Muslim religious institutions. In other words, when Israeli and Western institutions began portraying Sufis as ‘good’ Muslims, Sufi activity in Jerusalem was undermined by the paradox to Israeli patronage. To illustrate: al-Bukhari often participated in events hosted by the Jerusalem municipality. While these functions gave him great visibility within Israeli society and drew international attention, the events undermined his standing within his own community.⁴²⁰ No other Muslim would dare accept such invitations. In this particular regard, Ron Geaves’ account of Sufism in Jerusalem was accurate:

⁴¹⁹ Bram, "Spirituality under the Shadow of the Conflict: Sufi Circles in Israel," 125.

⁴²⁰ "Spirituality under the Shadow of the Conflict: Sufi Circles in Israel," 128.

Some [interviewees] claimed that the Israelis encouraged interfaith dialogue post-Intifada and were happy to work with Sufism as a non-political or peaceful Islamic option. This was, of course, a two-edged sword as Israeli patronage could be seen as betrayal.⁴²¹

Al-Bukhari's moderate, reconciliation-oriented Sufism was, thus, caught in the catch-22 of Israeli patronage. His willingness to cooperate with Israelis was seen as a betrayal to his community. But had he taken a different stance—anything other than conciliatory—his institution would have been disrupted and suppressed as was the case with Jerusalem's other Sufi institutions.

This chapter has been about institutional disruptions and creative religious improvisations. And analysis has dealt with a very narrow segment of the Jerusalemite population. In the next chapter, I widen the analytical scope drastically: I examine disruptions that involved all Jerusalemites. I explore Ramadan rituals and the Israeli disruptions that led to a cacophony of improvisations that resonated deeply.

⁴²¹ Geaves, "'That Which We Have Forgotten': The Emergence of 'Traditional Islam' as a New Movement in Global Muslim Religious Contestation," 43-44.

Chapter 6

Ramadan: The Resonance of Protest

The Murder of Muhammad Abu Khdeir

Muhammad Abu Khdeir was kidnapped in the early morning hours of July 2, 2014. A car quickly pulled up beside him on the street at 3:45 a.m. Three men jumped out and forced him into the backseat. They drove him to a nearby forest, poured gasoline down his throat and set him ablaze. Muhammad Abu Khdeir was a sixteen-year-old Palestinian from Shuafat, East Jerusalem. His kidnappers were Israeli. Muhammad was on the street at this hour waiting for friends outside the Shuafat Mosque. They were going to prepare *suhur* together, the predawn Ramadan meal.⁴²² While his murderers' motivation was unrelated to the religious practice, Muhammad Abu Khdeir's participation in the practice put him in the vulnerable position that got him killed.

Ramadan mornings in Jerusalem are typically quiet, but this day was different. News of Muhammad's kidnapping and immolation spread posthaste. Israel published false allegations to evade blame— Muhammad was gay and the victim of an honor killing.⁴²³ The city seethed with anger and demonstrations erupted everywhere. The Shuafat light-rail station—a conspicuous apparatus of Israeli infrastructure—was across the street from the kidnapping; protestors had destroyed the station by mid-morning. Israeli police deployed throughout the city in force to control the rage. The day marked the most

⁴²² Gregg Carlstrom, "East Jerusalem Clashes Follow Teen's Murder." *Al-Jazeera English* (July 3, 2014a), <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/middleeast/2014/07/palestinian-youth-body-found-amid-tension-2014727956766566.html>.; Quique Kierszenbaum, "Palestinian Teenager Mohamed Abu Khdeir's Abduction 'Caught on Cctv' – Video," *The Guardian* (July 3, 2014), <https://www.theguardian.com/world/video/2014/jul/03/cctv-palestinian-teens-mohamed-abu-khdeir-abduction-video>.

⁴²³ Samah Jabr, "On Israel's Insanity Defense and the World's Shared Delusion," *The Washington Report on Middle East Affairs* 33, no. 6 (2014).

significant protest since the Second *Intifada*. A total of 170 Jerusalemites were wounded.⁴²⁴



*Protests after Muhammad Abu Khdeir's Killing (Left).
Photo Credit: (Activestills 2014).
The Shuafat Light-Rail Station the day after his killing (Right).
Personal Photo July 4, 2014.*

Understanding these events requires context. Three weeks before, on June 12, three Jewish teenagers had been kidnapped at the bus stop adjacent to Alon Shvut in the Gush Etzion settlement block between Bethlehem and Hebron. Israel launched Operation Brother's Keeper to locate them and retaliate. The next seventeen days were filled with closures and movement restrictions throughout East Jerusalem and the West Bank. Israel arrested over 350 Palestinians, and five were killed. Israel restricted entry to al-Aqsa Mosque and thousands prayed on the streets. Gaza was under siege, too. This is how Ramadan 2014 began in Jerusalem—the month typically filled with rich communal traditions and religious devotion was consumed by war. In this chapter, I ask two questions: How were religious rituals disrupted during this angst-fraught period? And how did improvised religious rituals become tools for protest?

While the previous chapter was about a very narrow, possibly esoteric, expression of the Muslim faith in Jerusalem, this chapter is about the entire city and how all Muslims are drawn into the dynamics of

⁴²⁴ Other events from the day include: Settlers attacked Palestinian cars in Jaba' a village adjacent to Pizgat Ze'ev, damaging dozens. Gazans fired 9 mortars—no damage or injuries were reported. Israel attacked 15 targets in the Gaza strip, injuring 11, including three civilians. Israel demolished the home of Ziad Awad, who Israeli authorities charged with the killing of an Israeli police officer in April 2014. The assassination was called 'a deterrent.' Ihmoud, "Mohammed Abu-Khdeir and the Politics of Racial Terror in Occupied Jerusalem," 2. Ben White, "Chronology: 16 May - 15 August 2014," *Journal of Palestine Studies* 44, no. 1 (2014).

disruption and improvisation. I argue that Ramadan rituals in Jerusalem are regularly disrupted and never routine. I examine several case studies where Israeli disruptions—be they aural or spatial, ongoing or temporary—are connected to ritual improvisations. I first explore two popular Ramadan traditions, the *Musahharati* and the Ramadan cannon. In both cases, disruptions involve the production of sound and improvisations are primarily about keeping the threatened traditions alive. Next, I discuss the ongoing disruptions of *iftars* and Friday Pilgrimage. These rituals are practiced ubiquitously, and every Muslim in Jerusalem is influenced by them in some capacity. Palestinians are continuously improvising simply to perform the rituals. The case studies paint a broad canvas for understanding the dynamics of disruption and improvisation on a city-wide scale.

I then examine Ramadan 2014, specifically, where religious rituals were temporarily but acutely disrupted. I compare two case studies—*Salat al-Fajr* at al-Aqsa's Gate and the 48k Night of Power March—arguing that the former was a religious ritual turned catharsis of solidarity; the later was a planned protest that made use of religious themes opportunely. Both cases were improvisational and drew together multiple themes, creating moments with immense resonance. I conclude the chapter by analyzing a counter-intuitive response to disruption, celebration. In Ramadan 2016, Jerusalemites made a new improvised statement through the Damascus Gate Celebrations. These improvisations, like the 2014 improvisations, had a particular resonance that defined a moment. They affirmed Jerusalemite's shared solidarities by celebrating in a public space together.

This chapter, thus, builds upon the broader thesis of disruption and improvisation by focusing on one particular improvisational effect—improvisations that define a moment. Since the city is constantly changing, Muslims regularly face new challenges and opportunities to express their faith. To capture the idea in a slightly different formulation, Jerusalemites “believe as they live” more than they “live as

they believe.”⁴²⁵ The distinction may seem subtle, but the difference is profound. There is a responsiveness and an immediacy—an in-the-moment-ness—to the Jerusalemite experience that is important to highlight. The dynamic comes out clearly as I analyze case studies from three successive years.

Several of the study’s repertoire of themes from Chapter 4 resonate clearly throughout the Chapter. First, Sacred Space plays an important role. As a sacred city, Jerusalem is the focus of great religious activity during Ramadan. Al-Aqsa Mosque hosts *tarawih* prayers (the supererogatory prayers performed daily after fasting is complete). During the last ten days of Ramadan, tens-of-thousands perform *i’tikaf*, the act of dedicating one’s time to God in a Mosque. On Ramadan Fridays, approximately 300,000 Muslims come to pray in al-Aqsa. On The Night of Power, upwards of 400,000 Muslims stay up all night, performing religious rituals in the Mosque. Nationalism is another theme. I have observed elsewhere that religious and national symbols often overlap. They do so easily because rituals are multi-vocal. In this chapter, such overlaps occur regularly. Imagined soldieries are expressed across time and space: they are of particular importance in Ramadan 2014 since Palestinians, as a whole, felt under attack. Rituals were important because they became conduits through which their shared attachments could be expressed. Resistance is the third theme. As Palestinians understand it, Israel is a settler-colonial state that occupies Jerusalem. And whether Israel is accommodating to Muslims in Ramadan or not, they have a deeper problem of illegitimacy. The city is rightfully Palestinian, and Israel should, therefore, be resisted. The dynamic underlies every case study in this chapter. Finally, local culture is a theme. As I have observed elsewhere, Jerusalem has a rich sense of local heritage and pride. Various dimensions of Jerusalem’s local culture come through here, particularly in my discussions the Ramadan cannon and the *Musahharati*. Old City residents have a culture of

⁴²⁵ Sarah A. Tobin, *Everyday Piety: Islam and Economy in Jordan* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2016), 11. Tobin’s source was Joan A. Estruch and Elizabeth L Glick, *Saints and Schemers: Opus Dei and Its Paradoxes* (Bridgewater, NJ: Replica Books, 2000).

volunteerism during Ramadan, too. They aim to facilitate the experience of pilgrims who do not have the opportunity to pray in al-Aqsa Mosque day-by-day as they do.

Before I discuss the chapter's specific case studies, a few words of introduction about Ramadan are in order. Ramadan is the ninth month of the Islamic calendar. Since the calendar is based on the lunar cycle, the month's dates change each year. While I was in Jerusalem from 2011-2015, Ramadan came in the middle of summer which made for particularly long and arduous fasting days. The evolving dates of Ramadan are significant in Jerusalem since Muslim and Jewish holidays occasionally—and inevitably—coincide.

While the Qur'an only makes explicit reference to Ramadan once, the month is inextricably tied to the Muslim experience.⁴²⁶ Fasting from dawn to sunset throughout the month is the fourth pillar of Islam. Beyond fasting, Muslims throughout the world celebrate it with special foods and family gatherings, festive decorations and gift exchanges. But the month ultimately derives its significance from Muhammad's prophetic experience. Muhammad is said to have received his first revelation during the month. While the exact date is unknown, it is traditionally celebrated on the 27th of Ramadan. Muhammad later received more clarity about the significance of the night, it became known as *Laylat al-Qadr*, the Night of Power.

The power of religious activity is multiplied in Ramadan. As a very popular *Hadith* states, "The gates of Paradise are open and the Gates of Hell are closed."⁴²⁷ God is said to atone for people's sins. The increased value of pious acts translates into people being more actively engaged in pious activities. Hence, the month is often called *shahr al-Deen*, the month of religion. One evening in Ramadan 2015, I struck up a conversation with the skinny, ball-cap-clad guy overlooking the Damascus Gate next to me. I asked what he thought of Ramadan.

⁴²⁶ *The Holy Quran*, al-Baqara 2:185.

⁴²⁷ I use trustworthy here in a technical sense. The Arabic term is *sahih*. *Hadith* are categorized according to how likely Muhammad himself was to have made the statement. A saying deemed *sahih* is understood as completely trustworthy. Muhammad ibn Isma'il Bukhari, *Sahih Al-Bukhari* (Damascus, Syria: Dar Ibn Kathir, 1987), Book 30, Hadith 9.

“The best part of Ramadan is that everyone walks straight with their religion,” he replied.⁴²⁸ I heard this comment (or variations of it) many times in Jerusalem. It explains why all Muslim Jerusalemites are tied into the dynamics of disruption and improvisation.

Aural Disruptions: *Musahharati* and Ramadan Cannon

When a loud banging broke the early morning silence, I woke with a start. Looking out my window, I saw three teenage boys beating drums. What were they doing? Or—more importantly—*why* were they doing it? They were singing and chanting, and it was 3:30 a.m. I glared out my window to no effect. After the drummers finished meandering the streets, I eventually fell back asleep. Later, I asked my landlord why he tolerated such racket. He laughed and explained that I had met the *Musahharati*. This was my introduction to the Jerusalem-Ramadan experience. In this section, I examine two Ramadan traditions, the *Musahharati* and the Ramadan cannon. Both produce sounds that Israelis deem bothersome and threatening and therefore disrupts.

The *Musahharati* are an important Ramadan tradition in Jerusalem and throughout the Muslim world. Their job is to wake sleeping community members to take *suhur*, the pre-dawn meal. Muhammad Abu Khdeir, whom we met earlier, was kidnapped while preparing for *suhur*. The meal is eaten shortly before the dawn call to prayer (*adhan al-fajr*), allowing some sustenance before the day’s fast begins. Etymologically, *suhur* and *Musahharati* are linked, both derive from the same trilateral root—Sa Ha Ra. Like the ones outside my window, the *Musahharati* are typically young men. They walk through the neighborhood, banging drums and chanting the refrain: “Oh sleeper, proclaim the oneness of the eternal one.”⁴²⁹ At the month’s conclusion, they go door-to-door asking how they did, the unspoken intent being to gather tips.

Jerusalemites typically feel positive and nostalgic about the *Musahharati*. They look forward to the drums and chanting as it gives

⁴²⁸ Personal Interview, Damascus Gate, East Jerusalem, June 23, 2015.

⁴²⁹ *ya nayem wahhed ed-dayem*

Ramadan a personal and traditional touch.⁴³⁰ I, too, developed similar feelings. But for people unaccustomed to the traditions as I had been, the tradition can be startling and annoying. But for Israeli settlers who move into Palestinian neighborhoods, they come with the idea that the neighborhood belongs to them. Disrupting the practice is justified, therefore, for the sake of their sleep. Since Israeli settlers have the backing of the state, the military intervenes on their behalf, disrupting the *Musahharati*. An Al-Jazeera feature from 2016 on the *Musahharati* in the *Bab Hitta* community in the Old City illustrates the dynamic. A young *Musahharati* explains:

We have been waking up the neighborhood for about 7-years... They [the neighborhood] didn't have any Musahharati before... People are really happy. They pray for us a lot... we renew the people by what we say and bring to the people for Suhur.... Because I am the Musahharati, I have been arrested more than once. The Israeli government came and arrested us, saying we are irritating the settlers—that we are irritating the settlers and the police, the ones who stand at the gate of the Haram [al-Sharif]. In the end, for sure, they want to wipe out the Jerusalem and Palestinian identity.⁴³¹

The young man affirmed his community's appreciation of the tradition and Israel arrested him for bothering settlers. The Bab Hitta neighborhood is the same community from Chapter 5 where the Zawiyat al-Naqshbandi is located. It is entirely Palestinian, save the Bet Warsawa settlement where a small group of Israeli settlers live.⁴³² Israel justified the disruption because it bothered the soldiers and settlers. A mundane religious tradition was drawn into the conflict between the city's indigenous and the colonizers. Scholars of settler-colonialism have noted that the control of sound is one battleground of settler-colonial states. Before discussing sound interference at length, however, I explore another similar case, the Ramadan cannon.

I arrived early to the *Maqbarat al-Mujahidiyn* (The Martyrs' Graveyard). As the man in the adjacent shop lowered the metallic door,

⁴³⁰ Interview, East Jerusalem, July 20, 2016. See also, Qleibo, *Before the Mountains Disappear: An Ethnographic Chronicle of the Modern Palestinians*, 182-84.

⁴³¹ al-Jazeera Arabic, "al-Quds—al-I'tiqal Yulahi q Musahharati Bab Hitta bi-al-Quds," *YouTube* (June 28, 2016), https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zLbhV95_E-4.

⁴³² Michael Dumper, "Israeli Settlement in the Old City of Jerusalem," *Journal of Palestine Studies* 21, no. 4 (1992): 50.

I asked: “Has the guy who shoots the cannon arrived?” He replied negatively but assured me he would be on time. I sat on some steps and waited. The Fighter’s Graveyard lies on a hill north of Jerusalem’s Old City, the main entrance on Saladin Street. The Ramadan cannon (*madfa’ Ramadan*) is a famous tradition in Jerusalem. Each sunset (and sunrise) during Ramadan, Raja’i Sanduqa fires the cannon, signifying the beginning and end of each day’s fast. The cannon’s sonorous blast is an essential part of the Ramadan festivities. Everyone anticipates its resonant declaration. The tradition began during the Ottoman period and the cannon is fired in Oman and Yemen and other cities throughout the region to this day.⁴³³ Cannons are packed with gunpowder (not cannon balls) and fired at the moment the sun vanishes from the horizon, and the fast is finished for the day. Historically, several Palestinian cities have practiced the tradition; Nablus, Hebron, and Ramallah have all had Ramadan cannons. The tradition has vanished in every Palestinian city except Jerusalem. After I met Raja’i Sandoqa, he explained that Israel had forced the discontinuance of all the other Ramadan cannons in Palestine.⁴³⁴

When Raja’i arrived at the graveyard, I met a slender, balding man with wire-rimmed glasses and a thick mustache. He had come alone, and I asked if I could accompany him. He shrugged his shoulders and signaled for me to follow. As we ascended the stairs, I learned he was an actor. He had lived in America several years, working for Sesame Street and other children’s television programs. He returned to Jerusalem for family and heritage—no other place was home. His family had been in Jerusalem for many generations and was one of the first to build outside the Old City wall in the 1900s. Today, his family owns five buildings in the *Bab al-Sahira* neighborhood on Saladin street.

As Raja’i and I approached the cannon, I commented on its modern appearance. He explained that it was a British armament the

⁴³³ Dana Moukhallati, “Keeping Alive the Tradition of the Ramadan Cannon,” *al-Arabiya English* (July 21, 2013), <http://english.alarabiya.net/en/special-reports/ramadan-2013/2013/07/21/Keeping-alive-the-tradition-of-the-Ramadan-Cannon-.html>.

⁴³⁴ Personal Interview, Raja’i Sandoqa, July 5, 2015.

Jordanians had given to Jerusalem in the 1920s. The original cannon from the Ottoman period was on display in the Islamic museum on the Haram al-Sharif. He explained that the tradition began in Istanbul after someone had given the Sultan a cannon. He fired it the same evening, and it happened to be Ramadan. The following day people commented that the cannon blast helped them know when to end the fast. The Sultan, seeing an opportunity, claimed it had been intentional and, thus, a tradition began. Raja'i further explained that because there had been no electronic speakers at the time, it was nearly impossible to everyone to know exactly when to break the fast. The cannon solved that problem.

In Jerusalem, the Sanduqa family was delegated responsibility for the cannon during the late Ottoman period when various administrative responsibilities were established by the Status Quo.⁴³⁵ Raja'i inherited the responsibility from his father, who had inherited it from his father. When I spoke with Raja'i, he had fired the cannon for over twenty-five years. He hopes to pass responsibility for the tradition to his son one day. When I asked him my central research question— How has the conflict affected Muslim religious practices?— Raja'i laughed and launched into a detailed account. He started with the time he was arrested for firing the cannon once when his father was sick. The incident happened before his father had officially conferred responsibility to him.⁴³⁶ Next, Raja'i launched into an account of all the annoyances and red-tape he has had to jump through to keep the tradition alive: Israel has forced him to take courses, obtain certifications, and pass exams. Several times, Israel forbid him from shooting the cannon outright. Now, he pointed out; he's not even allowed to fire the cannon—Israel makes him shoot a firework out of an Israeli-approved firework-box, instead. The physical cannon still sits on the hill, but it is merely a prop for pictures. Then in 2014, Israel claimed

⁴³⁵ For details on the Status Quo, see Chapter 7 and Dumper, *The Politics of Sacred Space: The Old City of Jerusalem in the Middle East Conflict*, 107.

⁴³⁶ The story is also related on the following television special, Mawqa' 'Ulum al-Arab, "Ramadan fi al-Quds - Mawqa' 'Ulum al-Arab," *YouTube* (November 30, 2013), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0uIrtUctDS4>.

the cannon was too dangerous atop the hill and forced him to move it down ten meters. As Raja'i explained all of these annoyances, he pointed out that he cares deeply about the tradition, that he is fastidious. He jumps through every hoop Israel throws at him because he would hate for his own lack of diligence to prevent all of Jerusalem from enjoying the tradition. As he relayed these details, I was struck by the irony of an article I read several days prior for background research. The author touted Israel's commitment to honoring the Muslim tradition and pictured Nir Barakat (Jerusalem's mayor) smiling next to Raja'i alongside the cannon. The article mentioned nothing about courses, certifications, examinations, red-tape, or disruptions.⁴³⁷ When Raja'i finishing listing all the disruptions, I asked how he felt about all of it, personally: "I'm sick of the tension and the pressure and the hassle. If they want to get rid of it [the cannon], just say so. Talk straight and be honest about it."⁴³⁸

⁴³⁷ Ari Yashar, "Jerusalem Mayor Barkat to Fire Ramadan Cannon," *Arutz Sheva* (June 18, 2015), <http://www.israelnationalnews.com/News/News.aspx/196950>.

⁴³⁸ Interview, East Jerusalem, July 2015.



*Raja'i Sandoqa loading the Ramadan cannon.
Personal Photo, July 5, 2015.*

As we spoke, Raja'i periodically glanced at his iPhone. He had a Muslim-prayer-time app open. Two minutes before the appointed time, he asked me to back away. I complied. A moment later he lit the fuse and walked away, too, signaling for me to cover my ears. The firework exploded in a deafening blast. Seconds later, he took a sip of water, swallowed a pill, and gathered his belongings. He apologized for rushing away as he locked the cemetery gate. He had to drive half-an-hour to his neighborhood, Dahiyat al-Bareed, to have *iftar* with his family. He was hungry. I thanked him for his time and faced a deserted street. Everyone was somewhere else celebrating *iftar*.

The two case studies discussed here—the *Musahharati* and the Ramadan cannon—vividly illustrate Israel's interference with the production of sound. Scholars have examined sound in contested

spaces, noting that “Control over the sound of a given space symbolizes its political ownership/domination; hence, the audibility of national and ethnic minorities may constitute an arena for struggle or negotiation over their civic status, cultural saliency and territorial claims.”⁴³⁹ Israel used the control of sound as a means of making claims to space. Israel gave preference to the settlers and soldiers complaints and arrested the *Musahharati* because settlers were disturbed. There was no regard for the value of the Palestinian Ramadan tradition.

While this case has been primarily about disruption, there was an element of improvisation. Notice that al-Jazeera interviewed the *Musahharati*. Media harnessed the potential of the disruption to produce knowledge about the occupation—Muslim watchers who appreciate the *Musahharati* tradition would take offense. The disruption and improvisation mechanisms worked similarly with the Ramadan cannon. First, Israel’s disruptions (and occasional prohibitions) illustrated how Israel controls the use and production of sound within the occupied territories. Ostensibly, the blast bothered Israelis who interpret it as possibly a bomb.⁴⁴⁰ Second, Israel forced Raja’i to jump through hoops—certifications, courses, and examinations—to keep the tradition alive. In this sense, he had to improvise, and he did so to keep the tradition alive. Third, Arab news media covers the Ramadan cannon in Jerusalem every year. Like the *Musahharati*, disruptions created an affordance to disseminate knowledge about the plight of Jerusalemites in the face of Israel’s ongoing settler-colonial practices. But the use of media worked both ways: Israeli press used Nir Barakat’s visit to cast their treatment of the Ramadan cannon in a positive light.

Ongoing Disruptions: *Iftar* and Friday Pilgrimage

In this section, I explore Israel’s ongoing disruptions to Ramadan rituals. My analysis is focused on two specific rituals, *iftar* meals, and

⁴³⁹ Ori Schwartz, "Arab Sounds in a Contested Space: Life Quality, Cultural Hierarchies and National Silencing," *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 37, no. 11 (2014): 2035.

⁴⁴⁰ For a telling study on the relationship between sound and fear, see Steve Goodman, *Sonic Warfare: Sound, Affect, and the Ecology of Fear* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2010).

the Friday pilgrimage. Disruptions are primarily related to movement restrictions, the wall, and checkpoint as acute disruptors. I also observe that the neglect of the city's infrastructure causes diffuse disruptions. In Chapter 4, I discussed these disruptive forces in general terms; here, I observe their links to improvised religious practices, specifically.

In Ramadan, each day's fast ends with *Iftar*. The meal is taken with family and friends and is considered a time of feasting and celebration. The meal includes special foods, customs, and traditions. And even those who do not fast commonly take part in the meal. Palestinians regularly debate the merit of *iftar* comport. Some see the necessary coordination, planning, and social expectations as a distraction to the month's real purpose while others see it as contributing to the month's overall enjoyment.

The conflict disrupts *iftars* every day of the sacred month. Since visits to family and friends require planning, coordination, and traveling; a city full of movement restrictions becomes a continuous barrier to celebrating *iftar* together. From the previous section, Raja'i Sandoqa's half-hour drive after firing the Ramadan cannon is an apt example. His home is located on the other side of the separation barrier. Before the wall, the journey from Saladin Street to *Dahiyat al-Bareed* took 10 to 15-minutes. Now, after 15-minutes, Raja'i only arrives at the section of The Wall that blocks his street. He's forced to drive an additional 4-kilometers along the wall to pass through Qalandia Checkpoint. After passing through, he then drives 4-kilometers south on the other side of the wall. Depending on traffic, driving times can be doubled, tripled, quadrupled, or worse. The journey takes over two-hours on bad days. On the easiest days, the infrastructure of occupation doubles his driving time. But heavy traffic is the norm, not the exception.⁴⁴¹

As I observed in Chapter 4, the separation barrier is profoundly disruptive to Palestinian daily life in Jerusalem. The wall is particularly troublesome for *iftar* meals where families and friends are either

⁴⁴¹ I had countless personal experiences with this while I lived in an apartment adjacent to Raja'i's my first year in Jerusalem. The hassle of checkpoint congestion was the primary reason I found a different place to rent. Few (if any) of my neighbors in al-Ram had the financial latitude to make such a move.

physically prevented from celebrating together, or they are forced to improvise the coordination of their *iftar* celebrations. Thousands of improvisations occur every day on the micro-level: families and friends accommodate for checkpoint hassle by allowing extra time. They devise elaborate and circuitous alternative paths in hopes of saving a little time and avoiding long lines. But because the infrastructure of occupation has been in place for almost ten years, the disruptions have become somewhat normalized. At Qalandia, for example, waiting lines are nonexistent half-an-hour before *iftar*. The fact may seem surprising, but people have learned to anticipate congestion and go early.⁴⁴² But a simple story of ease masquerades the immense hassle—the checkpoint is a nightmare two hours before *iftar* since everyone leaves early. People get flustered and overwhelmed. The wait can be dehumanizing and maddening. Not having eaten the whole day only fuels the angst. A religious practice oriented around meaningful interaction with family and friends is often fraught with tension by the time the journey is complete. But even in this ‘normalized’ scenario, uncertainty remains. Israel can close checkpoints or block streets at any time. The ritual of enjoying *iftar* together is never routine. Uncertainty is one of the few consistencies.

Movement restrictions, however, are not limited to traveling from one side of the wall to the other. While riding public transport within Jerusalem is often distressing, riding it in Ramadan is harrowing.⁴⁴³ One time I grabbed a ‘service’ (a mid-size, ostensibly-legal public transit van) outside my apartment on the backside of the Mount of Olives a little more than an hour before sunset. I needed to make the two-kilometer trek to the Old City in time for *iftar*. The driver accelerated and braked like a New York taxi cab, jolting us in our seats. He honked and cursed whenever we encountered traffic. After making several U-turns, he decided to try his luck on a one-way street—backwards. When we

⁴⁴² Personal Interview, al-Ram, East Jerusalem, June 8, 2014.

⁴⁴³ I make this assertion completely aware that my perception of a harrowing experience could be different than Jerusalemites who have ridden in these vehicles their entire lives. However, I recall dozens of interactions with Jerusalemites where they recounted similar experience and had similar emotive responses.

encountered other cars and completely blocked the road, passengers began cursing him and demanding, “Beseech God’s forgiveness and turn around.”⁴⁴⁴ He directed his anger at the other drivers and yelled, “Stop. I’ve sin. It’s done. Now let me through.”⁴⁴⁵ The other drives would not relent. Eventually, our driver reversed the van and backed out of the jam. I jotted notes in my iPhone throughout the ride, making a time-log, tracking our locations and the driver’s actions. We zigzagged through the city for an hour and covered a dozen kilometers. We arrived outside Herod’s gate just minutes before the call to prayer. I lingered momentarily after the other passengers escaped. The Ramadan cannon broke the silence of an empty street, and the driver lit a cigarette to celebrate. On account of municipal neglect, navigating the roads of East Jerusalem is difficult, especially in Ramadan when congestion is greater. Disruptions are diffuse throughout the neglected urban environment.

Thus far, I have explained that Israeli disruptions to *iftar* meals are primarily related to their ability to plan and coordinate the meal with family and friends. Since the ability to move from one place to another is never routine or guaranteed, the ritual is regularly accompanied by uncertainty. Improvisations take the form of creative coordination. I now turn to Friday pilgrimage in Ramadan where the dynamics of disruption and improvisation operate similarly.

Jerusalem is a city of Muslim pilgrimage.⁴⁴⁶ While Muslims in Palestine rarely refer to their weekly journey to al-Aqsa Mosque for Friday prayers during Ramadan as a ‘pilgrimage,’ I use the term as anthropologists understand it—“Calendrical rights which intensify the ordinary social structure of the participants. A pilgrimage intensifies links among widely scattered persons who share a common ‘mytho-

⁴⁴⁴ *istaghfar allahu al-‘azym wa irja’*

⁴⁴⁵ *khalas irtakabt al-dhamb, khalas, khaly ny umurk*

⁴⁴⁶ Traveling to Jerusalem, historically, was also considered an optional but encouraged component of the Hajj to Mecca and Medina. It was called *ihram*, *ihlal*, or (as Jerusalemites called it *taqdy*s). For further information, see: Amikam Elad, *Medieval Jerusalem and Islamic Worship* (New York: E.J. Brill, 1995), 64-65.

historical' and cultural orientation."⁴⁴⁷ On any given Friday in Ramadan, between 200,000 and 300,000 thousand Muslims pray at al-Aqsa Mosque.⁴⁴⁸ Palestinians come from Halhoul and Hebron, Jericho and Jenin, Nablus and Bili'in. Most years, stories circulate about a hand-full of elderly Gazans whom Israel permits to pray in the sacred space.⁴⁴⁹ Muslims also come from overseas (I met pilgrims from America, Britain, and Indonesia, to name a few). In this section, I describe the journey to al-Aqsa and prayer within its precincts, highlighting the acute and diffuse ways Israel disrupts the process. I argue that there is a choreography of disruption and improvisation operating throughout the case. I use the term choreography in the sense that there is a level of routinized engagement and coordination occurring between Palestinian Muslims and the Israeli State. I have organized my description spatially and sequentially, moving from the experience of those whose journeys require traversing great distances to the inhabitants of Jerusalem's Old City.



*Prayer at al-Aqsa Mosque, the Dome of the Rock in background.
Photo Credit (Abu Rmeleh 2015).*

⁴⁴⁷ Alexander Moore, "Walt Disney World: Bounded Ritual Space and the Playful Pilgrimage Center," *Anthropological Quarterly* 53, no. 4 (1980): 210.

⁴⁴⁸ Dumper gives the number 250,000. Dumper, *Jerusalem Unbound: Geography, History, and the Future of the Holy City*, 231.

⁴⁴⁹ Shlomi Eldar, "Gazans Lament Loss of Permits to Visit Al-Aqsa During Ramadan," *al-Monitor* (June 10, 2016), <http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/fr/contents/articles/originals/2016/06/gaza-west-bank-mosque-al-aqsa-ramadan-travel-permits-israel.html>.

For Gazans, performing Friday prayers in al-Aqsa Mosque is not merely disrupted—it is denied. The journey never begins. When Israel gives permits (which it rarely does), they are given to a select few elderly individuals. But even with these permits, the journey is arduous. The Erez checkpoint is demoralizing and inhumane, a place notorious for repeated checks, inspections, and long, long waits. The trip is demanding, physically, emotionally, and spiritually.

For West Bank Palestinians, the journey is often no less demanding. Broadly conceived, the trip has four legs—from home to checkpoint, through the checkpoint, traveling through East Jerusalem, and arriving at al-Aqsa Mosque. The first leg of the journey is mundane. Once a West Bank resident has resolved to take the journey, they make plans and provisions. Many pack bags with personal effects, making plans to stay with family and friends. I was asked multiple times to make my apartment available during Ramadan. Some wanted to stay a night; others envisioned a month-long stay. Such plans and provisions are a standard feature of the West Bank resident's Jerusalem pilgrimage experience. Others make plans to remain in al-Aqsa Mosque and perform *i'tikaf*, the act of spending extended amounts of time in a mosque dedicated to religious activity (See Chapter 7). Setting out from their homes, people use private cars, public buses, and shared taxis. And their willingness to embark on the journey is tied directly to what they anticipate at the checkpoint.

The second leg is the checkpoint. Qalandia is the access point from the north, Rachel's Tomb (or the 300 Checkpoint) is the access point from the south. Checkpoints are where pilgrim's journeys are inevitably disrupted and sometimes denied. As I discussed previously, movement restrictions are a pervasive element of the Palestinian experience. Seeing the importance of Ramadan to the Muslim community, however, Israel has made special accommodations for specific demographics of people during Ramadan. Before violence broke out in 2014, for example, Israel announced the following entry accommodations: all Palestinians above 60-years-old would be permitted without restriction; on Fridays, women of all ages and men

above 40 would be allowed entry without restriction; on other days of the week, a limit of 20,000 men and women under 35-years-old would be given special entry permits; all children under 12, if accompanied by a parent, would be allowed without restriction; people with first-degree relatives in Jerusalem would be given permits.⁴⁵⁰ While specific numbers and demographic splits may vary slightly year-to-year, the general outline of the permissions is similar.



*Women passing through Qalandia Checkpoint Ramadan 2015.
Photo Credit (Saleem 2015).*

Having permission never implies easy passage. At Qalandia, for example, people are herded through massive infrastructures of the occupation—iron gates, concrete blocks, turnstiles, and x-ray machines. The above picture illustrates. Israeli soldiers are everywhere. Some check ID's, others perch in observation towers, others are horse-mounted. Each is outfitted with weapons of aggression and defense. For Palestinians, waiting is inevitable. Moving through the massive infrastructures can take hours. Personal space is nonexistent. Then, even if a person's demographic is permitted or has special permission,

⁴⁵⁰ News Agency Ma'an, "Israel Announces Ramadan Permit Plans for Palestinians," (June 27, 2014d), <https://www.maannews.com/Content.aspx?id=708145>.; Yoavas Shaham, "Raghim al-Ikhtitaf, Isra'il Tamnah al-Filistiniyun Tashiylat fi Ramadan," *al-Masdar* (June 26, 2014), <https://goo.gl/hmdHEG>.

their passage is not guaranteed. Looking askance at a soldier can be grounds for being denied. The experience is degrading and wearisome.

Another option exists, however, and it entails added personal risk. People—mostly young men—find and exploit weaknesses in the occupation's infrastructure. They jump the wall. They either want to avoid the hassle and humiliation of the checkpoints, or they don't have formal permission. Since I lived in apartments close to the wall (on both sides), I watched hundreds climb ladders on one side and descend ropes on the other. One Friday morning in Ramadan, my wife took our son outside to ride his bike. A man jumped over our apartment wall and landed right in front of her, a young man dressed in a long white robe with a full beard. His sudden appearance startled her. Her presence surprised him, too, no doubt. After an awkward moment, he asked how to get to al-Aqsa Mosque. My wife gave directions, and he thanked her, jumping over the wall in the direction she indicated. My field notes are riddled with similar experiences. Climbing the wall is a common occurrence, especially on Ramadan Fridays.

After someone has passed through the checkpoint or jumped the wall, they continue to the Old City. This is the third leg of the journey. Logically, various options exist. People take public buses, private cars, and (sometimes legal) shared taxis. Palestinian bus companies in East Jerusalem run at max-capacity on Ramadan Fridays. Most buses are reserved for making the trek between the two main checkpoints (Qalandia and the Bethlehem 300) and the Damascus Gate. Others maintain their routes in and through East Jerusalem. Bus drivers I spoke with reported long, taxing days, continually navigating congestion. Private cars and shared taxis are a common form of public transport for Friday prayers at al-Aqsa. Streets are flooded with vehicles and parking is near impossible. The shoddy roads of East Jerusalem are incredibly challenging to navigate since every open space becomes a potential parking space. The foot-wide street divider between Herod's and Lion's Gates, for example, becomes a parking lane. Beyond the logistical difficulties, non-Jerusalemites are bombarded by unfamiliar sights, sounds, and experiences. They see the massive effects of Israel's

settler-colonial project first hand, many for the first time. They see soldiers, checkpoints, and settlements. Sights are most shocking for the elderly who have recollections of the city from their youth. The city is both familiar and foreign, a living disruption to their memories.

After disembarking, people make their way to the Old City gates. They pass Israeli signs outside the Damascus Gate in English and Arabic, welcoming Muslims to the city and giving good wishes for Ramadan. When I asked Palestinians about these signs, they had various responses. Some viewed the signs as benign gestures of goodwill while others saw them as tools of the occupation to sell their positive and tolerant image to the world. As my ball-cap-clad acquaintance from the Damascus Gate pointed out, “Why do they write in English? We all read Arabic.”⁴⁵¹ Others view them as evidence of the creeping normalization of occupation.

Pilgrims make the final leg of their journey on foot within the Old City. Here, Jerusalem’s Old City residents play a unique role. They take pride in helping people make their way through the city. They offer directions, manage the flow of traffic at bottlenecks and gates. Some people help prepare *iftar* meals to be served on the Haram al-Sharif. Others open their family homes to the pilgrims. The most treasured childhood memories of Nisreen, my wife’s language teacher, involve being at her grandmother’s house in the Bab Hitta neighborhood. Every Ramadan Friday, they filled their home with pilgrims. People used their restrooms and performed *wudu’* (cleansing) to prepare for prayer. Pilgrims prayed on their roof when space on the Haram al-Sharif was too cramped. People even prayed in their living-room, on the large window seal. When I asked whether or not praying in this place ‘counted’ as being in al-Aqsa, she assured me, yes—that particular window jutted out over the Haram al-Sharif and was, therefore, within the boundaries of the sacred space. I asked if they offered these services to receive blessings (*hasanat*) from God. She said yes, but that was not the primary way they thought of it. As Old City residents, it was their privilege to help. Nisreen also spoke of her family

⁴⁵¹ Personal Interview, Damascus Gate, East Jerusalem, June 23, 2015.

volunteering to clean al-Aqsa Mosque on Friday nights after the crowds died down.⁴⁵² Once the arduous journey is complete, it is time for prayer. To capture the experience, I've included an excerpt of my field notes from my participation on the Third Friday of Ramadan 2015:⁴⁵³



Outside Bab al-Asbat, the third Friday of Ramadan shortly before prayer. Personal Photo July 2015.

Last Friday, I learned I could participate in prayers without having to explain myself to Israeli soldiers or Awqaf employees.⁴⁵⁴ If I stayed in the open area between the Old City gate and the gate to the Haram al-Sharif, no one bothered me. It was an ideal spot to observe and participate. Today, I found a shady spot and leaned against the wall close to an elderly man [pictured above] soliciting donations for a mosque construction project in Bethlehem. He called out: 'A gift to a mosque is a gift to the House of God.' Occasionally, a passerby gave him change. When one man gave 100 ILS, the old man raised his frail hand, giving thanks to God.

I was struck by the diversity of people flowing into the Mosque: women were dressed modestly, wearing Palestinian thawb or jilbabs (all were wearing hijabs); some men wore western clothes, others wore long robes of various colors. Many people entered in small groups, presumably with their families. Others walked alone. To protect their

⁴⁵² Personal interview, East Jerusalem, June 26, 2014.

⁴⁵³ I recorded these notes after I returned home that afternoon. I have revised them slightly, here, for the sake of clarity, focus, and readability.

⁴⁵⁴ For details on why I could not enter the Haram, see Chapter 7.

heads from the sun, several men balanced prayer rugs on their head. One balanced a newspaper in this way. A number of elderly people carried small stools. One guy toted his motorcycle helmet underarm. A father pushed a stroller with his infant child inside. Meanwhile, vest-clad volunteers directed the masses, "Women to the right. Men to the left," they shouted. Depending on the density of the crowd, instructions were either polite and upbeat, or emphatic and forceful. At one point the Hilel al-Ahmar (emergency services) rushed against the crowd up-stream, carrying an elderly woman on a stretcher. It seems she had passed-out. The exhaustion from fasting and heat took her out.

Many people stopped short of entering the mosque, making the shared open-space their destination. They sat in small groups, leaning against a wall or shady places. Some women toted huge bags and sat beside them (I later realized they were full of the goods to be sold after prayers). A man walked around with a bottle of water, splashing people. Everyone seemed grateful to cool their faces. He splashed me as well. I had to wipe my sunglasses. Israeli soldiers were everywhere, too. Some perched on the Old City wall, looking over the crowd, others guarded the gates, and others still roamed throughout the open space. Everyone was watched.

I chuckled at one scene. Four Palestinian youth—three guys, one girl—walked along the top of the Old City wall. Two perching Israeli soldiers were blocking their way. The youth politely asked to pass, and the soldiered leaned back. At the end of the wall, it was apparent they had not planned their descent. Pointing fingers, they debated an exit route. They agreed on a spot with protruding notches and climbed down. The guys went first. Since their landing spot happened to be a small graveyard for ancient Muslim rulers, they carefully calculated their steps. The guys helped their female companion whose jilbab made the wide gaps and narrow steps an awkward struggle. The group finally made it and moved on. The scene was thoroughly amusing.

A few minutes later, the call to prayer rang out, and the khutba (sermon) began. People continued to flow into the Mosque. I recognized Sheikh Ekrima Sabri's voice, the former Grand Mufti of Jerusalem. He began, "Oh, Muslims. Oh, Murabitin..."⁴⁵⁵ He quoted several verses from Surat al-Shu'ara, pointing out God's judgment upon the Jews for their lack of belief. He called for an end to the occupation and reminded his listeners of the brutal killing of Muhammad Abu Khdeir the previous year. As he spoke, the inflow of worshipers slowed. He paused for the supplication. People lifted their hands and quietly intoned personal prayers. Sheikh Sabri finished the khutba with remarks about the virtue of fasting.

The space filled with commotion as everyone moved into prayer lines. People laid out their rugs, some turning them horizontally to share. With no other option, I slipped between two guys who, unfortunately, had no prayer rugs to share. Moments later, the bustle ended. Everyone was

⁴⁵⁵ ya muslimun, ya muslimat, ya murabitun, ya murabibat

in line. The Imam called out, "Allahu Akbar, Allahu Akbar..." We prayed. I put my knees, hands, then forehead to the ground. I sweated profusely as the grimy stone below emitted heat.

The moment prayer ended everyone in my vicinity made for the rear gate. For fear of being bulled-over in the crowd, I went with the flow. I realized that people who stayed in the open space wanted a head-start on the mass exodus. Everyone pushed forward forcefully. People shouted in frustration at the shoving and commotion—salli 'ala al-Nabi (pray to the prophet). As I approached Bab al-Asbat gate, I heard a swell in the commotion from behind. A stretcher was being muscled through the crowd; another elderly woman had collapsed.

Finally, I made it out the gate and turned left with the stream. Vendors had set up stalls along the path. They sold everything: fruit, nuts, household items and everything between. One man peddled goldfish from an aquarium. At the end of the makeshift market, I turned right down the hill and began my journey home. It took me over an hour to reach my apartment. Typically, it takes 8-minutes.

Whether someone is trying to plan an *iftar* celebration with family or making their way to al-Aqsa Mosque for Friday prayers, they face ongoing physical disruptions. The infrastructure of Israel's occupation is everywhere and forces Palestinians to adjust. Whether they are acute like those caused by checkpoints and the wall, or diffuse like the city's poor infrastructure and the disorienting experience of seeing the evolving landscape of the settler-colonial city, disruptions are sewn into the fabric of the experience. I have shown how Israel has a complicated relationship with Ramadan. On the one hand, the State gives additional entry permits and posts welcome signs for Muslim pilgrims; on the other, it dictates who enters and arrests people for jumping the wall. I have also shown how disruptions make opportunities for improvisation: Like the man who appeared out of nowhere in front of my wife, people jump the wall. Like the Palestinian youth scaling the Old City wall, people improvise new routes. These snapshots are part-and-parcel of the choreography of disruption and improvisation. Scholars of pilgrimage have shown that journey to a sacred center can be a source of both individual and collective empowerment.⁴⁵⁶ The vast participation of

⁴⁵⁶ Friedland and Hecht, "The Pilgrimage to Nebi Musa and the Origins of Palestinian Nationalism," 109.

Muslims in the Friday pilgrimage shows how Palestinians are drawn into the collective experience of their community. They are linked together by the common participation in a community-wide religious ritual. While there are ongoing disruptions year-by-year, the links between collective empowerment and disruption became particularly important in 2014 when access to the Mosque was almost entirely disrupted. Before I discuss this further, however, one final point is in order.

Ongoing and physical disruptions to Muslim access to al-Aqsa Mosque have created an affordance for a discursive improvisation. During fieldwork when I discussed these disruptions—particularly access to al-Aqsa Mosque—people often commented that God was primarily concerned with their intention (*niyya*). They would receive rewards (*hasanat*) on the basis of their intent to pray in al-Aqsa Mosque, not whether they physically made it there or not. As my friend, Mamdouh, the carpenter forbidden from ever entering Jerusalem, explained one day, “I am not able to go, *khalas*, our Lord forgives me. Inside, I have the intention, the intention to pray in al-Aqsa. God judges me according to my intention. This is present in the Qur’an.”⁴⁵⁷ Mamdouh is saying, in other words, that God is not primarily concerned with his physical location but his intention. Intention (*niyya*) is a well-established doctrine within Islam that is typically linked to the validity of prayer from technical and theological standpoints. It must be expressed (internally or externally) at the outset of prayer.⁴⁵⁸ Mamdouh, however, has extended the doctrine’s application to the specific circumstances of his physical inability to access al-Aqsa Mosque: God rewards him equally whether he physically prays in al-Aqsa Mosque or not. His record is calculated according to his intention, not his physical location. This is a discursive improvisation. While it is unlikely Mamdouh formulated this theological explanation personally (he may have heard it from a religious authority of some sort), the point of the discourse’s

⁴⁵⁷ Personal Interview, al-Ram, East Jerusalem, May 21, 2014.

⁴⁵⁸ For a detailed theological discussion on the issue of *niyya*, see: Marion Holmes Katz, *Prayer in Islamic Thought and Practice* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 44-48.

improvisational nature still stands: the community is responding creatively to the physically disruptive nature of the occupation.

Several people pointed out, however, that the assurance gained from knowing that God was judging them according to their intention would never adequately compensate—socially, emotionally, or spiritually—for the loss of the actual experience of praying in al-Aqsa Mosque. The point is related to the previous discussion about pilgrimage being a means of collective empowerment and solidarity. Finally, returning to the issue of numbers and quotas, my interlocutors cautioned me about focusing too much on precisely how many people Israel allowed to enter Jerusalem. There were two reasons; first, the number of individuals who were denied says nothing about those who did not go because their denial was a foregone conclusion. Mamdouh, above, is an apt illustration—he does not even try. Second, the numerical focus could occlude the more significant issue for Palestinians, Israel’s illegitimacy as an unwelcome occupier. To every Muslim in Palestinian, praying in al-Aqsa Mosque is a religious right, and one that is routinely disrupted or denied.

Ramadan 2014: Disruptions and Improvised Protests

Now that I have examined the ongoing and physical disruptions of Muslim religious practices that occur year-by-year, I turn to the pervasive and temporary disruptions caused by the 2014 Summer Gaza War. In this section, I answer this chapter’s two principal questions: How were religious rituals disrupted during this angst-fraught period? And how did improvised religious rituals become tools for protest? To answer, I examine two case studies where the symbolic feature of multivocality allowed the rituals to become expressions of anti-colonial struggle and protest. The first case—*Salat al-Fajr* at al-Aqsa’s Gate—is primarily about a religious ritual that becomes a form of protest. The second—the 48k Night of Power March—is a planned protest that harnesses the power of religious symbolism as its animating impulse. In both cases, the improvised rituals had the second effect—they drew together multiple dynamics and had a specific resonance that defined

the moment. Before I explore these case studies in detail, I give an account of the salient political events that occurred in the month's lead-up and how they shaped these specific religious rituals.

In the month preceding Ramadan 2014, tensions mounted at the Haram al-Sharif. On Tuesday, June 10, Israel confiscated the ID's of some women as they entered the mosque; other women were prohibited entry outright. The Ma'an News article discussing the confiscations and restrictions also quoted Sheikh Omar Keswani, director of al-Aqsa Mosque, as saying a group of children participating in a summer camp was prohibited entry, too.⁴⁵⁹ When Palestinians protested the restrictions, Israel forces intervened.⁴⁶⁰ Two days later on Thursday (and as previously discussed), the kidnapping of the three Jewish teenagers occurred. Israel launched Operation Brother's Keeper, implementing pervasive movement restrictions, arresting over 350 and killing five Palestinians. After Friday prayers at the Haram al-Sharif the next day, Palestinians demonstrated in solidarity with the arrested. Israel suppressed the demonstration, wounding 28 and detaining eight.⁴⁶¹ One week later (Friday, June 20) Israel forbid all Palestinians under the age of 50 from entering the compound. In protest, Palestinians prayed outside al-Aqsa's gates. Again, attempting to suppress the situation at various flash-points, Israel used pepper-spray and other crowd dispersal techniques.⁴⁶² On June 25, five days later, Israel permitted 30 right-wing Jewish activists who call for the destruction of al-Aqsa Mosque to enter the al-Aqsa Mosque compound (See Chapter 7). Two Palestinians were injured in resulting clashes.⁴⁶³

⁴⁵⁹ News sources are notoriously unreliable for reporting the easing of restrictions.

⁴⁶⁰ News Agency Ma'an, "Clashes at Al-Aqsa Compound Gate." (June 11, 2014b), <https://www.maannews.com/Content.aspx?id=703628>.; "Worshippers Demonstrate at Al-Aqsa Compound," (June 11, 2014g), <https://www.maannews.com/Content.aspx?id=703765>.

⁴⁶¹ News Agency Ma'an, "28 Injured, 8 Detained in Fierce Clashes at Al-Aqsa," (June 13, 2014a), <https://www.maannews.com/Content.aspx?id=704495>.

⁴⁶² News Agency Ma'an, "Hundreds Perform Friday Prayers in Streets of Jerusalem." (June 21, 2014c), <https://www.maannews.com/Content.aspx?id=706394>.

⁴⁶³ News Agency Ma'an, "Woman, Child Hurt as Israeli Police Attack Worshippers in Al-Aqsa," (June 25, 2014f), <https://www.maannews.com/Content.aspx?id=707714>.

The day before Ramadan (June 27) an article by IMEU (Institute for Middle East Understanding) summarized the previous month's events: Israel had raided and ransacked over 1,000 private Palestinian homes, the offices of political parties in the West Bank, refugee camps, and the campus of Birzeit University; over 500 Palestinians had been arrested or detained; more than 250 children had been arrested; nine Palestinians (mostly unarmed civilians) had been killed.⁴⁶⁴ Israel surprisingly announced the same day (June 27) that some West Bank Palestinians would be given permits to enter Jerusalem for Ramadan observances, a move aligning with previously discussed precedent.⁴⁶⁵ Given the circumstances, however, Danny Dannon, Israel's Deputy Defense Minister, opposed the plan. Israel reneged on its commitment a day later—permissions were announced but never given.⁴⁶⁶ Ramadan began in this intensely strained atmosphere, making the sacred month's arrival anything but an occasion to celebrate.

Two days after Ramadan began, news broke that the bodies of the three Israeli youth had been found. They had been buried in shallow graves in a field outside of Hebron. Shock and grief overcame the Israeli State. They held a massive memorial the next day. The funeral was followed by anti-Arab demonstrations, right-wing solidarity marches, and parliamentarian-led social media incitement.⁴⁶⁷ Israel vowed revenge. An Israeli Settler ran over a nine-year-old Palestinian child near Bethlehem.⁴⁶⁸ And by the next morning, Muhammad Abu Khdeir was killed. Palestinians seethed with anger. The next day

⁴⁶⁴ Institute for Middle East Understanding (IMEU), "Israel's West Bank Crackdown," (June 27, 2014.), <https://imeu.org/article/israels-west-bank-crackdown>.

⁴⁶⁵ Daniel K. Eisenbud, "Jerusalem Police Implement Security Measures for Month of Ramadan," *The Jerusalem Post* (June 29, 2014), <http://www.jpost.com/National-News/Jerusalem-police-implement-security-measures-for-month-of-Ramadan-360944>.

⁴⁶⁶ Filistin al-Yawm, "'Isra'el' Tu'aliq Manah al-Tasarih lil-Filisiniyn bi-Sabab al-Awda' al-'amniyya," (July 06, 2014), <https://paltoday.ps/ar/post/203490>.

⁴⁶⁷ Ali Abunimeh, "Israeli Lawmaker's Call for Genocide of Palestinians Gets Thousands of Facebook Likes." *The Electronic Intifada* (July 7, 2014), <https://electronicintifada.net/blogs/ali-abunimah/israeli-lawmakers-call-genocide-palestinians-gets-thousands-facebook-likes.>; Asher Schechter, "Selfies in the Service of Hate," *Haaretz* (July 3, 2014), <http://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/.premium-1.602767>.

⁴⁶⁸ IMEMC Agencies, "Israeli Settlers Attack Civilians in Hebron; 9-Year Old Hit by Israeli Settler Car in Bethlehem," (July 1, 2014), <http://imemc.org/article/68291/>.

(Thursday, July 3), news spread of another attempted kidnapping: four Israeli Settlers tried to force a Palestinian child into their car in the nearby settlement of Pisgat Zeev. Fortunately, the child escaped.⁴⁶⁹ Israeli troops clashed with Palestinians in Qalandia, Al-Ram, Shuafat, Silwan, and Issawiyya. Twenty-one Palestinians were injured. Soldiers used rubber-coated bullets and stun grenades.⁴⁷⁰

In advance of Friday prayers the following day, Micky Rosenfeld, the Israeli Police Spokesman, announced that Israel would restrict access to al-Aqsa Mosque to women and men above 50-years-old.⁴⁷¹ Palestinian accounts, however, claimed that women under 40 were not permitted either.⁴⁷² (Recall that 200,00 to 300,000 worshipers typically attend Friday prayers in Ramadan.) The stage was set for a massive protest. Thousands were denied access to the mosque and prayed on the streets.⁴⁷³ Clashes continued throughout the day. Meanwhile, in Shuafat several kilometers away, thousands gathered for the funeral of Muhammad Abu Khdeir. Afternoon prayer, protests erupted and lasted through the evening.⁴⁷⁴

⁴⁶⁹ News Agency Ma'an, "Locals: Settlers Try to Kidnap 7-Year-Old in Beit Hanina," (July 4, 2014e), <http://www.maannews.com/Content.aspx?id=709927>.

⁴⁷⁰ White, "Chronology: 16 May - 15 August 2014."

⁴⁷¹ Agencies, "Israel on High Alert for Slain Palestinian Teen Funeral," *The Telegraph* (July 4, 2014), <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/middleeast/israel/10945711/Israel-on-high-alert-for-slain-Palestinian-teen-funeral.html>.

⁴⁷² Middle East Monitor (MEM), "Israel Prevents Hundreds of Palestinians from Entering Jerusalem During Ramadan," *Middle East Monitor* (July 4, 2014), <https://www.middleeastmonitor.com/20140704-israel-prevents-hundreds-of-palestinians-from-entering-jerusalem-during-ramadan/>.

⁴⁷³ Caravan, "Israel Prevents Thousands from Praying in Al-Aqsa," *Caravan: Search for a Better World* (July 6, 2014), <http://caravandaily.com/portal/israel-prevents-thousands-from-praying-in-al-aqsa/>.

⁴⁷⁴ Middle East Eye, "Live Blog: Rising Israel-Palestine Tensions," (July 3, 2014), <http://www.middleeasteye.net/news/live-blog-rising-israel-palestine-tensions-1609924766>.



*Hundreds gather after prayers outside the mosque in Shuafat where Muhamad Abu Khdeir was kidnapped.
Photo Credit (Carlstrom 2014).*

When the situation seemed it could get no worse, a video surfaced the next day of Israeli soldiers kicking and beating a handcuffed and prostrate fifteen-year-old youth in Shuafat.⁴⁷⁵ The teen was Tariq Abu Khdeir—Muhamad Abu Khdeir’s cousin. He had come from America to celebrate Ramadan with family. The video sent another round of shockwaves through the community. These were the political events of the first full week of Ramadan 2014. How were religious rituals disrupted during this angst-fraught period? And how did improvised religious rituals become tools of protest?

The hassle of movement restrictions that occur every year compounded throughout the month. Many people simply gave up on their *iftar* plans with family and friends. *Iftars*, where people had to cross checkpoints, were impossible. People also did not go out for fear of getting caught in confrontations. Regarding the ritual of fasting, my friend Basel,⁴⁷⁶ a Western-educated dentist from a prominent Jerusalemite family, explained what happened:

⁴⁷⁵ Steven Rex Brown, "Israeli Police Brutally Beat, Detain Florida Teen While He Was Watching Protests over Slaying of Palestinian Cousin: Family," *New York Daily News* (August 4, 2014), <http://www.nydailynews.com/news/world/israeli-police-beat-detain-fla-teen-family-article-1.1856079>.

⁴⁷⁶ Basel is not a pseudonym. While explaining the research and the ethical expectations, he explicitly asked not to have a pseudonym. He had no misgivings about others connecting him to his comments and opinions.

*Now in terms of the conflict and Ramadan, of course, it was a horrible Ramadan. We spent our time in Ramadan on the news...psychologically, we were devastated. And, of course, with no eating and drinking and [being] psychological torn apart, it was very difficult to fast. The feeling, everything was tense, everyone wanted to fight with you. You couldn't talk to anybody because everyone was more angry than usual. It was a very tense month.*⁴⁷⁷

The war provoked a tense and anxious atmosphere where performing religious rituals was difficult. The implicit rhythm required to practice rituals was completely disrupted. But disruptions nevertheless created affordances for improvisations. I now narrow the focus of my discussion to two specific case studies, cases where the second improvisational effect was in operation—the resonance to define a moment. But first a quote from David Kertzer whose definition of ritual I use throughout the study: “When people are oppressed by the overwhelming force of a militarily superior power, and especially when they have no traditional mechanism for large-scale political organizing, ritual can provide a basis for resistance and revolt.”⁴⁷⁸

Salat al-Fajr at al-Aqsa's Gate

As the previous discussion mentioned, Israel placed entry restrictions of al-Aqsa Mosque throughout Ramadan 2014. People responded by praying on the streets. To convey the particular dynamics of disruption and improvisation for these prayers, I have chosen to examine *Salat al-Fajr* (Dawn Prayer) outside Bab al-Asbat on the third Friday of Ramadan. Amjad Arafah captured the prayer on video and posted it to YouTube.⁴⁷⁹ What follows is a narrative account of his video footage.

The videographer, sitting in the front-passenger seat, aims his camera beyond the windshield. A night sky is offset by uplights casting an orange glow on Jerusalem's Old City Walls. The scene is silent save

⁴⁷⁷ Personal Interview, East Jerusalem, August 24, 2015.

⁴⁷⁸ Kertzer, *Ritual, Politics, and Power*, 168.

⁴⁷⁹ Amjad Arafah, “Jum'a 2014-7-18 al-Quds al-Masjid al-Aqsa al-Mubarak Fajran. Wa al-Du'a' lil-Mujahidiyn bi-Gaza,” *YouTube* (July 17, 2014), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mvZKjg-3OgY>.

Israeli soldiers standing between the wall and the road, donning their regular military accouterments: bulletproof vests, walkie-talkies, cargo pants, and semi-automatic weapons. It's about 3:45 a.m. The car passes *Bab al-Sahira* (Herod's Gate) moving East. At the northeast corner of the Old City, several bands of soldiers stand similarly dressed as the car drives past. Here, they gather casually around sections of temporary police-fence. The car turns right onto the Jericho Road, and the clip ends.

A split second later, the videographer is recording another military installation. Twenty-two soldiers stand along a police barricade, blocking the *Bab al-Asbat* ascent. When several soldiers notice the camera, they command the man (in Hebrew) to turn off the device. The scene cuts away again. The next moment the same view appears, but from a different vantage point. This time several Palestinians are seen with the soldiers. Some saunter about while others engage the soldiers, presumably requesting to pass the blockade. A group of three Palestinians is praying on the right-side of the screen. In the next shot, the videographer points his camera up the hill, north. Hundreds of Palestinian men fill the screen. The crowd is subdued. Some ambient chatter and two unseen men discuss last week's Friday prayers. Many have their hands stuffed in pockets or crossed over chest; the night chill is yet to lift. The men stand, waiting, facing Mecca.

The next scene is compelling. The camera continues to face north but has moved into the street. A barefoot prayer leader (*imam*) wearing an off-white *dishdasha* bellows out a Qur'anic verse: "Allah is strict in punishment. Thus (will it be said): 'Taste ye then of the (punishment): for those who resist Allah, is the penalty of the fire.'"⁴⁸⁰ When he finishes, he raises his hands beside his head, saying '*Allahu Akbar*.' He bends down, placing his hands on his knees. Those praying behind him respond, "*Allahu Akbar*," and bend down similarly. Over a loud-speaker in the background, *al-Fatiha* rings out, presumably from al-Aqsa Mosque.⁴⁸¹ The *imam* returns to upright position, saying, "God

⁴⁸⁰ The Holy Quran. al-Anfal 12b-14.

⁴⁸¹ *al-Fatiha* is the first Surah of the Qur'an and is recited several times in every prayer.

listens to the one who praise him.”⁴⁸² The crowd responds, “Our Lord, to you belongs the praise.”⁴⁸³ The *Iman* says ‘*Allahu Akbar*’ and puts his head to the ground. The crowd follows in a wave of prostration. A flock of Israeli soldiers is revealed while the men prostrate—some 30 soldiers perched against their police—barricade, silently peering over the prayers (see picture). The *imam* stands, declaring, ‘*Allahu Akbar,*’ and the others follow suit. The police disappear behind the mass of bodies.



Video screen-shot of men praying on street outside bab al-Asbat while Israeli soldiers block access to al-Aqsa Mosque.
Photo Credit: (Arafeh 2014)

The next angle captures the front line of prayers, long-ways. Men are standing, hands lifted at shoulder height for supplication. They affirm the *imam*’s petitions in a call and response fashion, saying “Oh, God.”⁴⁸⁴ The *imam*’s hands are dramatically lifted above his head; he beseeches God with passion and conviction:

Oh God, possessor of splendor and might,
Protect the Muslims in Gaza.
Oh God, be for them a supporter and protector.
Oh, Lord of the Worlds.
Aim their shooting, (The others affirm, ‘Oh God’)
Aim their shooting, (Oh God)
Aim their shooting, (Oh God)

⁴⁸² *sami’a li-man hamidahu.*

⁴⁸³ *rabbana, wa laka al-hamd.*

⁴⁸⁴ *ya allah.*

Oh God, [it is] upon you [to avenge], [those] who harm them and fight them.
Oh God, we beseech you to slaughter our enemies.
Oh God, stone their number and kill them completely.
And don't leave one of them.
Make an evil circle encompass them.
Oh God, show us a black day for them, like the day of Pharaoh,
A day like the day of Thamud.
Oh Lord of the Worlds.
Oh God, Oh God, Oh God.
As You protected the Muslims in Mecca,
Protect our family in Gaza.⁴⁸⁵

The *imam* finishes and the video cuts away. While this prayer may be (un)disrupted in the sense that it was conducted according to conventional *Sunni* prayer practices, the case is, nevertheless, evocative and exemplifies the dynamics of disruption and improvisation. First, the prayer was physically and spatially disrupted from being performed within al-Aqsa Mosque. Men under 40-years-old had been forbidden entry. The physical and spatial disruption made an affordance to improvise a new location. They prayed on the street. Since al-Aqsa Mosque is a sacred space and the prayer was meant to be performed within its precincts, the multiplied-merit of the prayer was denied. But as I already discussed, a discursive elaboration had been improvised to address that.

But the improvisation was more substantive than a physical location change; the disruption allowed the prayer to accrue additional resonances. As I observed in Chapter 1, rituals derive their strength from being symbolically multi-vocal. Also recall that rituals have several potential audiences—God, self, others—intended and unintentional. Thus, even before the *imam's* intoned supplications are brought into the frame, the fact of praying in the soldier's presence makes a clear statement. Since everyone I interviewed knew of Israel's restrictions at al-Aqsa Mosque, I often discussed these disruptions in fieldwork—What

⁴⁸⁵ For original Arabic, transliteration, and translation, see Annex 3. Multiple videos were posted on YouTube with similar solidarity supplications during Ramadan 2014. Here are two examples: al-Quds Maw'adna, "Du'a' Mu'athir Jiddan li-'Ahlna fi Ghaza li-Shaykh Muhammad al-Raba'y fi Laylat al-Qadr 2014," *Youtube* (July 25, 2014), https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xue_bT2UeKM.; Idha'a Sowl al-Ghad, "Du'a Laylat Al-Qadr Min Al-Masjid Al-Aqsa Li-Ghaza," *You Tube* (July 24, 2014), https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=15ZPZ5k_9fQ.

does prayer in front of soldiers on the street mean? Whether people personally prayed in these settings or not, they had responses—‘This is our mosque,’ ‘We are here,’ ‘God sees your injustice,’ ‘You are an occupier,’ ‘Your are unwelcome,’ ‘Leave us alone,’ ‘God is my sufficiency and perfect representative,’⁴⁸⁶ or simply, ‘God is Greater.’⁴⁸⁷ Each assertion illustrates one way the prayer can be understood and interpreted by those performing it. In other words, the disruptions created an affordance for an improvised performance with multi-vocal resonance. And notice the common thread of protest.

Now the *imam’s* supplication. In Islam, *du‘a’* (supplication) can be understood at the most basic level as ‘calling out.’ Marion Katz, who thoroughly investigates the phenomenon, explains that “the essence of *du‘a’* is to address God, and the content of that address is ordinarily human need and distress (although it can and should contain elements of celebration and praise).”⁴⁸⁸ Thus, supplication can be performed in many circumstances and in various ways. The supplication in question was performed within the parameters of *Sunni* orthodoxy. Generally, every *salat* includes *du‘a’*—recitation of *al-Fatiha*, the first surah of the Qur’an, could be understood as a supplication in this sense (“It is from You alone that we seek help.” etc.). More specifically, the end of every *salat* includes an open-ended opportunity for supplication. In this context, the *imam* included several standard elements—his evocation of God’s names, prayers for protection, and Qur’anic phrases. These elements are well within the bounds of Islamic *du‘a’* precedent. Where the *imam’s* supplication needs a more nuanced treatment is his expressions of solidarity with Gazans and curses upon his enemies. For this analysis, I return to Katz: “Despite the inclusion of *du‘a’* in every *salat*, scholars pondered the parameters of the more personal petitionary prayers that might be performed in the context of the

⁴⁸⁶ *hasaby allahu wa na’am al-wakyl*. The phrase evokes God’s ultimate judgment as the true arbiter of affairs. It can be understood as a curse.

⁴⁸⁷ Mamdouh, Personal Interview, al-Ram, East Jerusalem May 21, 2014; Rami, Personal Interview, Beit Haninah, East Jerusalem April 22, 2014; Amina, Personal Interview, Old City Jerusalem, February 10, 2016; Ahmed, Personal Interview, al-Ram, East Jerusalem, November 22, 2015.

⁴⁸⁸ Katz, *Prayer in Islamic Thought and Practice*, 29.

ritual.”⁴⁸⁹ After citing liberal and conservative interpretations, Katz concludes: “Both the source of the invocation (whether it had to be drawn from the *Qur’an* or *Hadith*, or could be freely improvised by the worshiper) and its content were debated by other early authorities as well.”⁴⁹⁰ Here, I am particularly concerned with Katz’s point about the improvisational nature of *du‘a’*. According to Islamic scholarship, worshipers have a degree of personal license. *Imams*, in other words, are free to improvise the content of their supplication as they see fit.⁴⁹¹

Since the *imam* focused his supplication on Gaza, having a clear understanding of the broader and immediate contexts of Gaza is essential. Since 2006, Gaza has been extremely volatile. Shortly after Hamas seized power on the heels of national elections, Israel imposed a strict blockade. No persons or goods have entered or exited the strip without Israel’s say. Restrictions have been stringent. The blockade has crippled the territory, plummeting it into extreme deprivation. And the situation has been exacerbated by a series of armed confrontations. I discussed the 2008-2009 Gaza War briefly in Chapter 4, for example. By 2014, the armed confrontation tally sheet included four more: the March 2010 events, the 2011 cross-border attack, and the two wars of 2012. This is the broader political context of the Gaza Strip. Within the immediate context of the 2014 Summer War, Israel had killed 243 Gazans since it launched Operation Protective Edge on July 8th.⁴⁹² This is not to mention the thousands of attacks, the number of injuries, or the damage to infrastructure and housing. At 10:30 p.m. the evening before the *Salat al-fajr* prayer at Bab al-Asbat, Israel launched a ground

⁴⁸⁹ *Prayer in Islamic Thought and Practice*, 33.

⁴⁹⁰ *Ibid.*

⁴⁹¹ The case could be made that the *imam* was also drawing from a tradition of *du‘a’* known as *qunut*, a form of supplication with precedent from Muhammad’s cursing of the clans responsible for slaughtering a group of Muslims. After outlining the supplication in detail, Katz explains: “The Sunni jurists (with the exception of the Malikis) also envisioned that the *qunut* should be performed in situations of public peril or distress (such as war, drought, or plague).” *Ibid.*

⁴⁹² I came to the number 243 by tallying the daily killings recorded by Ben White between July 8 and 17. See, White, “Chronology: 16 May - 15 August 2014.”

invasion in the Gaza strip, moving in with heavy artillery and shelling.⁴⁹³ The prayer at issue occurred within five-hours of the ground invasion. This is the immediate context of the *imam's* supplication.

The *Imam* prays curses upon his enemies—that God would destroy them. His language is filled with Islamic imagery: “*Oh God, show us a black day for them, like the day of Pharaoh*” is a reference to the Qur’anic story where God punishes Pharaoh for enslaving the Israelites. He also references Thamud, the people to whom God sent the prophet Salih. But they were seized by an earthquake and destroyed within a day for being insolent toward the command of God.⁴⁹⁴ When the *imam* beseeches God to, “Aim their [Gazan’s] shooting,” the crowd affirmed his petition by saying, “Oh, God.” The *imam's* improvised supplication has resonance. The supplication was a ritual turned catharsis of emotion, support, and solidarity. A protest.

In *Ritual, Politics, and Power*, David Kertzer uses the 1985 mass funeral of twenty-seven blacks killed by Apartheid police in South Africa to shed light on the power of rituals for protest. Some sixty-thousand had gathered to vent and grieve.

Although these rites [rituals] certainly allow people to ventilate their anger and their rage at their own powerlessness, they should not be seen as simple safety valves permitting the regime to continue without serious threat. In the absence of preexisting forms of national political organization, and given the government’s repression of more direct attempts to organize such national protest...the funerals...create a common identity, building a broad antigovernment solidarity. They also help create an alternative conception of a future political universe, and they instill strong emotions of resistance to the government.⁴⁹⁵

The word ‘funeral’ could merely be replaced with ‘prayer’ for a lucid account of the dynamics of the current supplication to emerge. Jerusalemites have close connections with Gazans. Their ties are personal (sharing extended family members), religious (almost all are Muslim), and national (both are Palestinian). As such, the *imam's* catharsis of solidarity is expressing a deep longing for God to intervene

⁴⁹³ "Chronology: 16 May - 15 August 2014," 29.

⁴⁹⁴ *The Holy Quran*, al-A'raf 77-78 and al-Qamar 33.

⁴⁹⁵ Kertzer, *Ritual, Politics, and Power*, 171-72.

on behalf of Gazans. But prayers like this have greater significance than venting anger at powerlessness; they also inculcate a shared vision of resistance. The symbolic power of ritual unifies, coordinates, and amplifies their emotive connection. Solidarity, in other words, became something they could do with their bodies, and the resonances of the improvisation defined the moment. This case study has been a religious ritual turned catharsis of solidarity; the next is an example of a protest that made use of religious themes opportunely.

The 48k Night of Power March

The second case study from Ramadan 2014 is the 48k Night of Power March. While the *Salat al-fajr* case study illustrated the dynamics of disruption and improvisation recurring throughout the month, this case shows the singular power of improvisation when channeled through the holiest night of the month, the Night of Power. Denial of access to al-Aqsa Mosque, movement restrictions, and the overall rage that captured Jerusalem provided the context and incentive to blur the lines between a political protest march and the symbolic power of the holiest night of the Muslim calendar year.

I first heard about the 48k Night of Power March while waiting in line at Qalandia Checkpoint. My wife and I were giving Nisreen, her language teacher, a ride to Jerusalem. As she scrolled through Facebook in our back seat, Nisreen announced: “Oh God, [*wallahi*] there’s going to be a demonstration at Qalandia tonight—48,000 people are coming!...wait.”⁴⁹⁶ After reading several more posts, she explained. People would gather at al-‘Amari Camp, north of Qalandia, and march through Qalandia to al-Aqsa Mosque, demonstrating in solidarity with Gaza and demanding access to al-Aqsa Mosque for the sacred night. Nisreen asked if we understood the symbolic meaning of 48—it was a reference to the *Nakba* (catastrophe) where some 700,000 Palestinians were forcibly expelled from their homes by Israel in 1948 (See Chapter

⁴⁹⁶ Personal interaction, East Jerusalem, July 25, 2014.

4).⁴⁹⁷ After we dropped off Nisreen, I called several more friends to discuss. They insisted I come.

To understand the significance of the 48k Night of Power March, I must put three dynamics in context; events in Gaza, the Night of Power's theological importance, and what Palestinians typically do for the sacred occasion. As the evening approached, Israel's assault on Gaza was unrelenting. Save the death-toll, little had changed in the week since the *Salat al-fajr* case. An additional 452 people had been killed, making 695 the Gazan casualty count for Operation Protective Edge in its first 16-days.⁴⁹⁸ Israel continued to decimate the strip and Jerusalemites continued to demonstrate.

The Night of Power is known in Arabic as *Laylat al-Qadr*. The name refers to the evening Muhammad received his first revelation. He had been in seclusion on Mount Hira fasting during the month of Ramadan. It was the evening of divine encounter. Later, Muhammad would receive another revelation, elaborating the significance of that first night:

We have indeed revealed this (Message) in the Night of Power:
And what will explain to thee what the Night of Power is?
The Night of Power is better than a thousand Months.
Therein come down the angels and the Spirit by Allah's permission,
on every errand:
Peace!... This until the rise of Morn! ⁴⁹⁹

As the text reveals, the Night of Power is accorded blessing of unparalleled spiritual power. Muslim scholars and interpreters have pondered the implications of these verses at length and concluded: the blessing and power of religious acts are multiplied 83.3 times on this sacred night.⁵⁰⁰ Thus, Muslims commit themselves to intense and focused prayer and other pious acts throughout the night. It is an evening of devotion and celebration, a night to encounter the divine.

⁴⁹⁷ Pappe, *The Ethnic Cleansing of Palestine*.

⁴⁹⁸ I came to the number 452 by tallying the daily killings recorded by Ben White between July 18 and 23. See White, "Chronology: 16 May - 15 August 2014," 29-34.

⁴⁹⁹ *The Holy Quran*, Surah 97.

⁵⁰⁰ Tobin, *Everyday Piety: Islam and Economy in Jordan*, 69.

While Night of Power practices vary throughout the Muslim world, the tradition is celebrated rather uniformly in Jerusalem.⁵⁰¹ Marwan, my barber, put it simply, “The Night of Power is an evening that Muslims wait for all through the year so that they can go to al-Aqsa Mosque and pray.”⁵⁰² Take the typical blessing of praying in al-Aqsa Mosque—500 *hasanat*—and multiply it by 83.3. The power of these prayers is immense. Thus, the best, most meritorious, way to spend the Night of Power is in prayer at al-Aqsa Mosque. Muslims make great effort to be there. More Muslims fill the Mosque on this night than any other single occasion of the year. Close to 400,000 Muslims attended in 2013.⁵⁰³ Two years later I heard a radio announcer say they were planning for one-million. An article reported the next day that 450,000 came.⁵⁰⁴ This is the setting for the 48k Night of Power March.

I had been invited to participate in the March but I was hesitant. My wife reminded me I now had a young family (our son was barely four-months-old) and I chose to stay in. Our apartment proved to be an effective vantage point, nevertheless. I recorded the experience the next day:

Shortly after sunset last night we [my wife and I] began hearing loud booming outside our apartment [in Beit Hanina]. At this point, a few loud sounds in the distance don't really alarm us—we're used to it. But last night was different. The booming went on all night. I kept my computer open with the live stream from Palestine TV. Most the coverage was from Qalandia, with occasional updates from Gaza and other places. I was unsettled and remained glued to the screen. Would I see the face of anyone I recognized? I called friends for updates, but it was hard to hear when I got through—blasts, sirens, and other sounds interfered (if they answered they were ok, right?) At one point, I got a clear connection with Ra'id [who lives in the area.] He was with friends on the hill opposite the protest in Al-Ram,

⁵⁰¹ For examples of celebration variance, see: P. J. L. Frankl, "The Observance of Ramadan in Swahili-Land (with Special Reference to Mombasa)," *Journal of Religion in Africa* 26, no. 4 (1996). Sarah Tobin wrote on the schedule weddings around the *Laylat al-Qadr* in Jordan. Tobin, *Everyday Piety: Islam and Economy in Jordan*, 68-72.

⁵⁰² Personal Interview, al-Ram, East Jerusalem, May 20, 2014.

⁵⁰³ Wael Salaymeh, "In Pictures: Ramadan's Holiest Night," *Al-Jazeera* (August 5, 2013), <http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/inpictures/2013/08/2013851380381790.html>.

⁵⁰⁴ IMEMC Agencies, "Over 450 Thousand Worshippers Mark Al-Qadr Night at Al-Aqsa," (July 15, 2015), <http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/inpictures/2013/08/2013851380381790.html>.

*watching it unfold. He was excited, and I was relieved. We heard the sound of gunfire, fireworks, rubber bullets, live ammunition, and stink grenades, until I went to bed some 4-hours later [about 2 a.m.].*⁵⁰⁵

Within a few days, media outlets came to the consensus that some 10,000 Palestinians participated in the March, that two were killed, and some 200 were injured.⁵⁰⁶ One source called it, "The largest demonstration in decades."⁵⁰⁷ That night, Israel killed 104 in Gaza; the following day, an additional 66. In the eighteen-days of the 2014 War Israel killed 865 Gazans.⁵⁰⁸

Not only did confrontations break out in Qalandia and Gaza that night, but they also erupted throughout Jerusalem. Israel had deployed 4,000 additional police in Jerusalem in anticipation. They limited access to al-Aqsa Mosque to Muslims over 50-years-old.⁵⁰⁹ Palestinians in Jerusalem were incensed. Thousands trampled the barriers at al-Aqsa's gates. Some youth set fire to the Israeli police station located next to the *bab al-Silsila* on the Haram al-Sharif.⁵¹⁰ Israel used crowd dispersal methods to extinguish the confrontations. The mere 14,000 Muslims who entered the Haram al-Sharif that night were overwhelmed by extensive disruptions.⁵¹¹ To put 14,000 in perspective, 97% of Muslims who would have come the previous and subsequent years were prevented. On the night when heaven and earth intersect, Israel severed the connection.

⁵⁰⁵ Fieldnotes, Beit Haninah, East Jerusalem, July 24, 2014.

⁵⁰⁶ Nir Hassan, *et al.*, "Two Palestinians Killed in W. Bank Clashes with Israeli Security Forces," *Haaretz* (July 24, 2014), <http://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/1.607157>.

⁵⁰⁷ Noa Yachot, "'The Largest West Bank Protest in Decades'," *+972* (July 25, 2014), <https://972mag.com/the-largest-west-bank-protest-in-decades/94280/>.

⁵⁰⁸ White, "Chronology: 16 May - 15 August 2014."

⁵⁰⁹ Ben Hartman and Daniel K. Eisenbud, "Massive West Bank Clashes Leave Palestinian Dead," *Jerusalem Post* (July 25, 2014), <http://www.jpost.com/National-News/Clashes-break-out-in-West-Bank-reportedly-leaving-a-Palestinian-dead-368864>.

⁵¹⁰ Personal Interview, Khaled, Old City Jerusalem, August 25, 2014. See also, International Crisis Group, "The Status of the Status Quo at Jerusalem's Holy Esplanade," 2.

⁵¹¹ Personal Interview, Mahdi Abu al-Hadi, April 16, 2016.

Every interaction over the next few weeks included discussion of Gaza, the 48k March, and al-Aqsa Mosque. The topic came up with Basel, my dentist friend:

Kenny—Where were you during Laylat al-Qadr?

Basel—I was in Ramallah. I wasn't here [in Jerusalem]. Everything was closed. I don't know if you've seen Laylat al-Qadr in years before, but it was different this year, for sure. I usually go down to the Old City but there was a big problem—there was a war happening. Muhamad Abu Khdeir was [killed] a week or ten days before. The [al-Aqsa] Mosque was closed off...

K—I was in Beit Hanina, hearing the clashes and watching the news. There were like 10,000 people...

B—[interrupting] — Yeah. I was there. There was a huge march. The 48k who came to Qalandia at that point, I was on the front lines. I have a video I can show you. It was beautiful. It was beautiful. If you know Qalandia, all the way to the end of that road was full of people. It was a really beautiful sight. Of course, if it [the march] was more organized, Qalandia Checkpoint would have been destroyed. What we lack right now as Palestinians is good leadership. We have no leadership. We have zero leadership. We have the energy. We have the charisma. We have the ways. But we don't have the organization and the leadership... If we had good leadership, I tell you, the conflict would not have lasted after Oslo... [pulling out his iphone]... Now listen, I'm going to show you this. I can show you Qalandia checkpoint. You know I felt bad that night because there was not proper leadership or organization. We could have taken over Qalandia for sure. But we didn't because we couldn't. This is the front line right here... [showing me a video]... It was beautiful. It was like 10 or 15k people behind me. Can you imagine that!⁵¹²

He handed me the phone, and the scene was smoke filled. As Basel recorded, he walked, holding the camera above his head for a better shot. The video jerked and jolted. The audio was scratchy. Firework blasts and the shots of teargas guns pierced through the noise of the crowd. People were everywhere, many chanting 'Allahu Akbar.' The video was like many I had seen on Facebook the previous week.

Basel's account aptly illustrates the dynamics of disruption and improvisation operating in the 48k Night of Power March. First, his yearly ritual was to spend the Night of Power in al-Aqsa Mosque with

⁵¹² Personal Interview, East Jerusalem, August 25, 2014.

family. In 2014, he was prevented from entering Jerusalem and caught up in the protest. Earlier in the interview, he had explained that he went to Ramallah early that morning for other reasons and by the time he attempted to return, Israel had blocked the way. His involvement was spontaneous and improvisational in this way. Second, the choice of Qalandia Checkpoint at the march's target was significant. The location enabled a condensation of meaning for symbolic activity. Helga Tawil-Souri explains that,

They [checkpoints] are part of Israeli strategies of separation, seclusion, fragmentation, and control; part of the voyeuristic, panoptic production of Israeli presence in Palestinian spaces. As sites of contest over borders, of control over land, and of surveillance over people, they have come to embody the imbalance of power between Palestinians and Israel; one of the (growing) mechanisms of Israeli colonialism used to isolate, atomize, and humiliate Palestinians.⁵¹³

Thus, Qalandia is a symbol of the occupation, a concrete form of disruption, literally and metaphorically. The space, therefore, became an ideal site to direct frustration, anger, and resistance. As I discussed in Chapter 1, rituals contain a dramatic element which allows them to be, "a means of generating powerful feelings."⁵¹⁴ Basel's account was effuse with emotion—"I was there...I was on the front lines... It was beautiful... It was a really beautiful sight." He was physically and emotionally swept up in the drama of the improvised protest.

Third, Basel was keen on Palestinian lack of organization. I opened the section with a Kertzer quote: "When people are oppressed by the overwhelming force of a militarily superior power, and especially when they have no traditional mechanism for large scale political organizing, ritual can provide a basis for resistance and revolt."⁵¹⁵ This is exactly what the 48k Night of Power March did. The March created a framework through which resistance and protest could be expressed. One sentence later, Kertzer claims that "What the oppressed lack is

⁵¹³ Helga Tawil-Souri, "Qalandia Checkpoint as Space and Nonplace," *Space and Culture* 14, no. 1 (2011): 22.

⁵¹⁴ Kertzer, *Ritual, Politics, and Power*, 11.

⁵¹⁵ *Ritual, Politics, and Power*, 168.

organization, and colonial regimes seek to prevent modern forms of indigenous organization from arising.⁵¹⁶ This was precisely Basel's point: Palestinians had the passion, they had the energy, but they lacked organization. Israel would work assiduously to keep them from organizing. Finally, the improvised march drew from the symbolic power of the sacred night. Gaza was under siege and access to al-Aqsa Mosque was all but completely forbidden. Israel was violating the sacred integrity of the Night of Power and offense was not limited to the devout. If the divine were to intervene in human affairs dramatically, it would be this night. I recall several interactions before the event where people deeply felt that something significant would happen; not merely because many people planned to participate, but because God would surely intervene on this sacred night.

On one level, each dynamic of the 48k Night of Power March should be analyzed separately (as specific 'notes' of the improvisation, if you will); but on another, the full resonance of the improvisation can only be appreciated if all the notes are heard together: The march's name—the 48k march—drew from the symbolic power of Palestinian nationalism and collective memories from 1948; the support of Gazans also affirmed national solidarities; Qalandia checkpoint made an apt target for the march as concrete manifestation of the occupation; the widespread tradition of spending the Night of Power in al-Aqsa Mosque; and the amplified religious power of the night make it the perfect occasion to beseech divine intervention. The march, in a sentence, was an improvised crescendo of symbols. As I have described the three effects of jazz improvisations, this ritual was of the second type—it struck a resonance cord that defined a moment. Whether or not the ritual is repeated is beside the point (it likely never will be), for this particular time and space the improvisation had perfect resonance.

Ramadan 2016: The Damascus Gate Celebrations

In Ramadan 2016, a spontaneous gathering started at the Damascus Gate. While vendors sell falafel, crepes, and kids-stuff in the

⁵¹⁶ *Ibid.*

space after *iftar* every year, someone hired a disk jockey and dancers to add more excitement. Before long, as people made their way to al-Aqsa Mosque for *Tarawih* prayers, they were drawn in by the energy. I learned about the gatherings from Salema, a West Bank friend who had not been to Jerusalem in 15-years. She had seen videos on Facebook and asked if I had attended.⁵¹⁷ I confessed I had not, but promised I would return with a report. I spent the next evening at the Damascus Gate and was blown away.

In this section, I examine the Chapter's final case study, the Damascus Gate Celebrations. While earlier case studies demonstrated that improvised religious rituals could be framed as protests and demonstrations, I argue here that they can also be celebrations. The celebrations were important because they allowed Jerusalemites to develop shared solidarities by celebrating in a public space together. Their physical location—the Damascus Gate—was critical because the amphitheater has often been used to make symbolic claims to space in the city, and the Celebrations gave Jerusalemites a way to reassert their claims. While they did align with regional holiday trends in a general sense, the Damascus Gate Celebrations carried a political message that was unique to Jerusalem. The Celebrations had a distinct resonance and defined Ramadan 2016.

The Damascus Gate is just that—a gate on the north side of Jerusalem's Old City wall. But the name also refers to the gate's large exterior stone amphitheater. The space feels expansive and welcoming, an iconic feature of Jerusalem's cityscape. People gather casually, and it is a natural theatre for public display. Israel also maintains an ongoing military presence in the area. In times of relative quiet, soldiers are always on hand. When tensions rise, their numbers multiply. To grasp the drama and significance of the improvised Damascus Gate Celebration, I must take a brief detour to describe an Israeli celebration

⁵¹⁷ Personal Interaction, al-Ram, East Jerusalem, June 15, 2016.

that takes place in the same space, the Jerusalem Day Parade.⁵¹⁸ In the present case, the Israeli Parade set the stage the Palestinian Celebration.

For Israelis, Jerusalem Day commemorates the city's 'liberation' and 'unification' that occurred in 1967.⁵¹⁹ The day includes patriotic speeches and assemblies that culminate in a massive parade through East Jerusalem. Thousands march through the Damascus Gate amphitheater chanting choruses of praise to the Israeli State. After lingering in the theatre, marchers eventually make their way to the Wailing Wall. Meanwhile, Palestinians look on from behind police barricades. For Palestinians, Jerusalem Day is a day of remembering the great setback (*yawm al-naksa*), a day of mourning and loss.⁵²⁰ But the parade also adds insult to injury (in the literal sense of the phrase): Palestinians report being cursed and degraded by Israelis every year. They chant 'Death to Arabs' and curse the prophet, Muhammad.⁵²¹ Shops inside the Damascus Gate get vandalized. And the amphitheater becomes an arena for Israel's lurid symbolic claims to the space. The images and insults have a residual effect on Palestinians, influencing the way they, too, relate to the space.

⁵¹⁸ An equally relevant (though less sinister) example would be Israel's the annual Light Festival. One week each summer, the Jerusalem municipality ornaments the Old City with electronic light displays. The Old City wall at Damascus Gate becomes a giant screen where various abstract designs are displayed.

⁵¹⁹ For a detailed ethnographic analysis of the event, see Abowd, *Colonial Jerusalem: The Spatial Construction of Identity and Difference in a City of Myth, 1948-2012*, Chapter 4.

⁵²⁰ While Palestinians officially remember *yawm al-naksa* on May 15, the commemoration specifically regards the losses of the 1967 Six-Day's War. This is a clear example where the use of lunar or Gregorian calendars is of particular importance in the ebb and flow of the conflict in Jerusalem.

⁵²¹ Boycott Apartheid, "Ziofascists in the Old City, "Death to Arabs" Chants on Jerusalem Day 2011," *YouTube* (June 18, 2011), [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sGrOZb3WpBU.](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sGrOZb3WpBU;); Nir Hassan, "Court Rejects Petition to Bar Jerusalem Day March from Muslim Quarter," *Haaretz* (June 5, 2016), <http://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/1.723176>.



*Israeli youth wave Israeli flags at the Damascus Gate for the 2016 Jerusalem Day Parade.
Photo Credit (Hassan 2016).*

I observed the Jerusalem Day Parade June 6, 2016. When I arrived at nearby Saladin street, the area was more crowded than normal. The walking path west of Herod's Gate was also cordoned off by barricades. As I approached the Damascus Gate, some Palestinians were walking, occupied with routine domestic activities. But the majority stood still, watching thousands of Israelis parade through their streets. Israeli flags waved, and music played. Participants chanted "The Jewish Nation Lives." Many wore stickers supporting Rabbi Meir Kahane, the former Israeli parliament member expelled from the government for actively calling for violence against Arabs. Other participants donned decals with images of greater Israel (the symbol of a movement aiming to annex the West Bank). Hundreds of Palestinians watched as thousands of Nationalistic Jews flooded the Damascus Gate amphitheater.

The June 6th date is particularly important to emphasize: the Jerusalem Day Parade happened on the first day of Ramadan. The sacred month would begin at sunset. The problem stems from the complication of calendar overlap discussed in Chapter 1. Since both celebrations (Ramadan and Jerusalem Day) are lunar-based, they occasionally overlap. And since Israel controls the city, it gives preference to Israeli holidays. Regarding the concurrence of the

Jerusalem Day Parade and the start of Ramadan, Nir Hassan, the well-known *Haaretz* columnist, quoted the Arab-Israeli Joint List Knesset Member, Yousef Jabareen, on the issue:

This [Jerusalem Day] is a provocative, racist and violent march whose sole purpose is to terrorize the Palestinian merchants of the Muslim Quarter... On the evening in which Palestinians celebrate Ramadan, a month of tolerance and brotherhood, the police chose, and the High Court approved, to allow marchers [to] provoke Palestinians, hurt them and sow hatred and fear... Can anyone imagine that the police would allow a similar march of Palestinians pass through the Jewish Quarter on the eve of Passover?⁵²²

The incident involving the police and High Court Jabareen references is one that involved march organizers, municipality workers, and advocacy groups—should the march’s start-time be moved up to accommodate Ramadan preparations? At the kerfuffle’s conclusion, march organizers agreed to start 15-minutes earlier. And, unsurprisingly, Palestinians still had to delay their Ramadan preparations.⁵²³ Like other years, the parade involved inciting and hateful speech directed at Palestinians. The Jerusalem Day Parade was the most recent public display at the Damascus Gate. And while I hesitate to draw a direct causal link between it and the Damascus Gate Celebrations, the two celebratory dramas had close temporal proximity and made use of the same theatre of space.

I attended the Damascus Gate Celebrations every night after Salema let me know about them. And each night, I was struck by the stark contrast with Ramadan’s past. I recalled Ramadan 2014 at the height of the Gaza war when Israeli soldiers swarmed the place, randomly (and thoroughly) checking Palestinian’s IDs. Other soldiers peered down from scaffolding-perches at the amphitheater’s apex. Nobody lingered in the space. It felt like Qalandia checkpoint, a non-space.⁵²⁴ Now—two-years-later—the amphitheater was packed. Israeli

⁵²² Hassan, "Court Rejects Petition to Bar Jerusalem Day March from Muslim Quarter."

⁵²³ Allison Deger, "Palestinians Forced to Delay the Start of Ramadan as Israel Celebrates 49 Years of Ruling Jerusalem," *Mondoweiss* (June 6, 2016), <http://mondoweiss.net/2016/06/palestinians-celebrates-jerusalem/>.

⁵²⁴ Tawil-Souri, "Qalandia Checkpoint as Space and Nonplace."

soldiers were there, but strangely, their peering presence seemed less invasive, almost irrelevant.

One Instagram video captured the spirit of the Damascus Gate Celebration vividly.⁵²⁵ The scene is filled with a throng of people. Dozens of smartphones are raised, pointing toward the traditionally-clad *dabka* dancers. Their swift and synchronized moves catch the viewer's eye, and an electric organ blares an upbeat cadence while the disk jockey's spirited voice interjects between the trills. The crowd latches to his refrain, "*Allah al-Hay*" (God is Alive) and chants the rhythm in time.⁵²⁶ As the videographer pans across the crowd, the scene is dynamic and alive—unmistakably Palestinian.



The Damascus Gate Celebration, Ramadan 2016.
To the left and right of frame, hundreds more watch, clap, chant, and video the dabka dancers in white pants. Screen Shot from Instagram video.
Photo Credit: (Coffeinmysippycup 2016).

⁵²⁵ Coffeinmysippycup, "Bab Al Amoud, Al Quds!" *Instagram* (June 30, 2016), <https://www.instagram.com/p/BHTK922j87x/>.

⁵²⁶ Few, I imagine, apprehend the Sufi origins of the phrase.

As everyone present was drawn into the ritual of celebration, I could not help but recall William McNeil's insight. He wrote the book *Keeping Together in Time: Dance and Drill in Human History* and argues in it that rhythmic muscular movements sustained over time create a euphoric fellow feeling that strengthens group solidarity as they participate in rituals together. McNeil terms this process 'muscular bonding' and observes that much of the process occurs at the sub-conscious level. But he explains that "the critical fact...is that whatever happens at a subconscious level in response to rhythmic stimulation from movements of the big muscles results in a diffused state of excitement that is definitely pleasurable at the conscious level."⁵²⁷ The Damascus Gate Celebrations gave Palestinians an opportunity to keep together in time. Whether someone was personally dancing or not, they were physically participating. They were drawn into the collective excitement, the euphoria. The celebrations fostered shared solidarity and created a condensation of meaning—what it meant to celebrate Ramadan in Jerusalem. And like other rituals, the festivities were interpreted in various ways.

The Celebrations made for great conversation—What's your take on the Damascus Gate Celebrations? Whether someone liked them or not, they were an excellent opportunity for Jerusalem's Muslims to reflect on what they thought Ramadan is or should be. To convey these various meanings, I give excerpts from three separate interviews. First, Nisreen, my wife's language teacher:

Nisreen—I say it gave life to Jerusalem. In the past Jerusalem was dead. It showed that the life of Jerusalem had returned. There were celebrations. There were people coming and going and buying stuff. The decorations were more beautiful, everything was more beautiful. Sure, Ramadan in Ramallah is cool, but not like Jerusalem.

Kenny—I heard people had different opinions. Some people were for it; others were against it... What did you think?

N—Typically, people say that a party is against religion, an environment of happiness is against religion, even though Islam is a religion of peace. God is not against happiness... But I am with the

⁵²⁷ William McNeil, *Keeping Together in Time: Dance and Drill in Human History* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995), 6.

parties. I don't need to forbid myself from them... Yes, there are always [different opinions]. Some people say Ramadan is only for worship and prayer. They are against the parties. But you have your time for prayer, and you have your time for celebration. You can have both.

K—What about the soldiers? I remember last year—there were lots of soldiers...

N—Yes, but they were still there this year. They just permitted the parties. But two years ago there was Muhammad Abu Khader who was burned and martyred. The situation was still very hot because of that. This year Israel permitted it.

K—It seems strange to me that...

N—[Interrupting]—People weren't expecting it either. I say Israel is smart and they play with us against our expectations. They do the opposite of what we think.⁵²⁸

To Nisreen, the celebrations rejuvenated the city. Since God was not, in her view, against happiness, the celebrations aligned with a proper understanding of Islam. Her opinion also alluded to another theme I occasionally heard—that Israel's allowance was a cunning political tactic to undermine Palestinian outrage at their legitimate grievances. While I hesitate reading too far into Israeli motives, the observation does align with a previous point about rituals being a means of public venting.⁵²⁹ While Nisreen was clearly for the celebrations, Mustafa Abu Sway opposed them.

When I asked Abu Sway his opinion, he had not heard about them.⁵³⁰ He was busy—fasting, praying, reading the Qur'an, having *iftars*, and delivering lectures—he explained. When I caught him up on the celebrations, he concluded that they were a distraction. He related his assessment to the commercialization of Islam, discussing restaurants that host *iftars*, have live music, and show *Bab al-Hara*, the

⁵²⁸ Interview, East Jerusalem, July 11, 2016.

⁵²⁹ See the *Salat al-fajr* case study.

⁵³⁰ Interview, East Jerusalem, July 20, 2016.

Syrian drama series.⁵³¹ These people in the restaurants were not praying. He viewed them as distractions from the real, spiritual purpose of the month. In her book *Everyday Piety: Islam and Economy in Jordan*, Sarah Tobin notes that "...in Jordan as well as in neighboring countries. One particular complaint is...the promotion of heightened levels and types of consumption during a time otherwise designated for the pursuit of heightened piety."⁵³² This was precisely Abu Sway's point —while the Damascus Gate celebrations were fun and exciting, they sidetracked people from proper piety. When I asked Yusuf Natcheh his opinion; he, too, noted the commercialization trend but focused primarily on the celebration's political twist:

First of all, this is becoming a fashion. Not just in Jerusalem, it is in other parts of the Islamic world. We used to celebrate Ramadan when I was young, and we were kids. It was not as extravagant then as it is these days. Times change. But in Jerusalem, I feel we are overreacting as a response to the occupation. We would like to be seen. We would like to be together. It's a good occasion to show the Israelis that we are here, that we are attached to our mosque and our country. Now it exists in Egypt, too, but here, it has a political meaning as well. We would like to put lights here and there, but it is also a message, a political message, an association with the place that we are going to continue. We are not going to disappear. The mosque is ours. You can read the message between the lines.⁵³³

While the Damascus Gate Celebrations aligned with regional trends, Natcheh came full circle on the dynamics of disruption and improvisation. Israel may do all manner of things, and with the Jerusalem Day Parade case, may frustrate or cause delays, insult or curse the Prophet, sing death chants or parade through public space. But Palestinians in their celebrations were really saying, "We are not going to disappear."

⁵³¹ *Bab al-Hara* is a Syrian drama series set in the Syrian French Colonial Period. It is very popular among Palestinians and Jerusalemites. For further analysis, see Omar al Ghazzi, "Nation as Neighborhood: How Bab Al-Hara Dramatized Syrian Identity," *Media, Culture & Society* 35, no. 5 (2013).

⁵³² Tobin, *Everyday Piety: Islam and Economy in Jordan*, 63. See also, Walter Armbrust, "The Riddle of Ramadan: Media, Consumer Culture, and the 'Christmasization' of a Muslim Holiday" in *Everyday Life in the Muslim Middle East*, ed. Donna Lee Bowen and Evelyn A. Early (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2002).

⁵³³ Interview, Old City Jerusalem, July 11, 2016.

I have shown that the Damascus Gate Celebrations struck a resonant chord with Jerusalemite in Ramadan 2016. While some opposed the ritual as one of consumerism's distractions; the improvised events, nevertheless, created shared soldieries and a sense of communal celebration through a confluence of factors. The space had been highly militarized in previous Ramadans, and the festivities allowed Palestinians to reclaim the space. The Celebrations also acted as a counterclaim to Israel's use of the space for the Jerusalem Day Parade. The symbolic properties of rituals were operating: they drew together various meanings, were multi-vocal and had an element of ambiguity. These dynamics converged to give Jerusalemites a sense that the improvised celebrations were genuine expressions of their faith and religion. They defined Ramadan 2016.

Conclusion: "We are Here!"

In this Chapter, I have shown the dynamics of disruption and improvisation operating in various ways. Israel disrupted the *Musahharati* and the Ramadan cannon because their sounds bothered Israelis. Improvisations here were somewhat limited, though they were required to keep the traditions alive. Disruptions were also used to produce media about the occupation. I explored the ongoing and physical disruptions that accompany the widely practiced rituals of *iftar* and Friday pilgrimage. Improvisations, here, were about devising alternative plans and creative workarounds. They also caused a discursive improvisation where, if someone intended to pray at al-Aqsa but was prevented, God would reward them for their intention whether they prayed in the Aqsa Mosque or elsewhere, or even if they did not pray at all. As I focused on Ramadan 2014, pervasive and temporary disruptions were front and center. Ritual improvisations took on overtones of resistance and protest. The *Salat al-Fajr* at al-Aqsa's Gate was primarily a religious ritual turned protest. The 48k Night of Power March was a planned protest that harnesses the power of religious symbolism as its animating impulse. In both cases, people were physically drawn into the corporate feeling, and the improvisations

defined the moment. Finally, I explored the Damascus Gate Celebrations where improvised rituals took the form of celebration. The celebrations' physical location was significant because it allowed them to act as a counterclaim to Israel's use of the space for the Jerusalem Day Parade. There was a collective solidarity and undertone where Palestinians were saying, in effect, "We are here."

The undertone of "We are here" was not limited to the Damascus Gate Celebrations, however. I came across this idea many times regarding Ramadan rituals. Whether Israel was disrupting rituals aurally, physically, or spatially—whether disruptions were acute or diffuse, ongoing or temporary—Jerusalemites had a unified voice: "We are here!" It explains why many of this chapter's improvisations had the second effect—why they often defined a moment. In the face of ongoing disruptions of various types and degrees, Jerusalemites were always searching for the right way to say "We are here." And when the improvisations connected, Jerusalemite's experienced their faith as something dynamic, alive, and relevant to the moment.

Although Nour and I had phoned often and tried to arrange *iftars* throughout Ramadan 2014, our plans kept getting canceled or delayed. He was easily my closest friend, but it had been impossible to see him. Several weeks after Ramadan, we were finally able to meet. When I arrived at the St. George Hotel restaurant, I noticed two things immediately: the place was empty, and he was wearing sunglasses inside. After we ordered coffee, Nour apologized for not being able to meet sooner—Ramadan had been horrible, he explained. Then for the next three hours, he unloaded. I listened to story after story; the protests, the tension, the rage, and the trauma. He hadn't known Muhammad Abu Khdeir personally, but they had many mutual friends. He had been there for the funeral. Nour never took off his sunglasses. At one point he told me what had happened to him the day before. He had gone to al-Aqsa for prayer, and a soldier stopped him at the gate, questioning him invasively. The soldier never let him pass, and the indignity enraged him. The age restriction had been lifted. He had come to pray—that was it. Why was that inadequate? As I struggled to

find a response, he continued, “It's hard, but it makes me love my city more and more. The Jews want to make us leave, but it makes us the opposite—it makes us love Jerusalem and al-Aqsa more and more.”⁵³⁴ Disruptions were re-shaping and intensifying Nour's connection to the Mosque and city. I often heard comments like this: the city and the Mosque were gravely threatened and, out of love, everything possible must be done to protect them. In the next chapter, I look at a case study where the dynamics of disruption and improvisation went beyond defining an improvisational moment and expressing the idea that “We are here!”—the disruptions were so disturbing and the improvisations resonated so deeply, they changed the course of the performance.

⁵³⁴ Personal Interview, East Jerusalem, August 30, 2014.

Chapter 7

The *Murabitat*: A Course-Changing Performance

The New Virgins of Resistance⁵³⁵

In Jerusalem, a popular music video on Youtube opens with a passionate voice proclaiming: “With our mountains and our valleys, with our men and our horses, [we are] *Murabitin* (*defenders of the faith*). With our hearts, our eyes, and arms, [we are] *Murabitin*.”⁵³⁶ Meanwhile, animated images of al-Aqsa Mosque, the Dome of the Rock, Israeli soldiers and settlers scroll across the screen. Muslims are present, too, protesting and being arrested. The introductory monologue ends, and the refrain begins, “God, God, God, God [is] with us. God. [We are] *Murabitin* to the day of reckoning.”⁵³⁷ The animated images turn to video clips of similar scenes: Muslims and Jews in confrontations on the Haram al-Sharif. The video had 120,000 views at the time of writing; yet, the number is hardly representative.⁵³⁸ The song played in Palestinian cafes and public spaces throughout the Fall of 2015. I regularly saw it on local news broadcasts and programs, too. One Palestinian from Jerusalem put it this way: “[The] *Murabitat* ⁵³⁹ are pioneers and heroes—the new virgins of the Palestinian resistance.”⁵⁴⁰

⁵³⁵ Portions of this chapter have been published in the following article: Kenny Schmitt, “Ribat in Palestine: The Growth of a Religious Discourse Alongside Politicized Religious Practice,” *Jerusalem Quarterly*, no. 72 (2017).

⁵³⁶ *bi-jibalna wa-suhulna, bi rijalna wa-khuyulna murabitin, bi-qulubna wa-ayunna wa bi-sawa'idna murabitin*. Alandalus, “Unshudat Murabitin - Lil-Masjid al-Aqsa al-Mubarak - Intaj al-Andalus.” YouTube (October 15, 2014), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NDmJPNKCHFw>.

⁵³⁷ *allah, allah, allah, allah wa ma'na allah. wa murabitin la yawm ad-din*.

⁵³⁸ I last observed the view-count in October 2016.

⁵³⁹ The feminine plural form of *Murabitin*. Since the murabitat—the women—were the primary actors in the movement, I use the feminine form of the term; even though, technically, the masculine form would be appropriate because men were involved, too. In the section “Genealogies of Ribat at the Haram al-Sharif,” I give a detailed explanation of the Arabic.

⁵⁴⁰ CITpax, “Options for Jerusalem & the Holy Sites” (Madrid, Spain, November 20-21 2015).

I first introduced the *Murabitat* at the outset of the dissertation. They were the women on the Haram al-Sharif, shouting ‘*Allahu Akbar*’ at Jewish settlers. Western and Israeli media sources have unsurprisingly framed these women as dangerous extremists, the bodily manifestation of Islamic radicalism. While their shouts of ‘*Allahu Akbar*’ carry stark religious and political potency, we must move past sensationalized and essentialized portrayals. We must understand their words and actions on their own terms. How do they explain their actions? How did they become convinced that this was the best way to resist Israeli settler-colonialism? Answering these questions is this chapter’s focus. I analyze the *Murabitat*, how they became ‘pioneers and heroes,’ and how they are reshaping the way Palestinians articulate their resistance to Israel, their faith, and their resolve to remain.

I contend that Israeli disruptions and Palestinian improvisations at the Haram al-Sharif led to the phenomenon now known as the *Murabitat*. The Israeli State, driven by the ideology of settler-colonialism and the activism of specific Jewish individuals and groups, has disrupted the Status Quo on the Haram al-Sharif. Palestinians—compelled to defend the Mosque—have improvised new religious discourses and practices to resist the disruptions. The disruption-improvisation dynamic in this chapter is neither isolated nor discrete but connected to the ongoing choreography and interaction between Israelis and Palestinians at the Haram al-Sharif. While men (the *Murabitoun*) have been involved, I focus primarily on the women (the *Murabitat*), first, because Israel has repressed much of the men's involvement and, second because Israel’s violent transgressions of the women's sacred, feminine honor has bolstered their prestige and influence. While the *Murabitat* have clear political significance, I maintain that the women involved understand their actions as sincere faith expressions.

This chapter is concerned with two primary themes, resistance and Sacred space. Resistance is a well-established in the Palestinian repertoire of themes (Chapter 4), and the *Murabitat*—by their presence, their voices, and their bodies—have added to the Palestinian repertoire of peaceful resistance vis-a-vis religious rituals. And in this sense, they

have had the third improvisational effect—their improvisations have changed the course of the performance. They have sparked an entirely new theme—that “We are all *Murabitin*.” Sacred space is the second major theme because the *Murabibat* have framed their discourses and practices in terms of resisting Israeli encroachment on the Haram al-Sharif. Since Jews also consider the site sacred, much of the conflict revolves around the two group’s competing claims to the sacred space. Following from this theme, geography also becomes a significant factor. The political and emotive capacity of the *Murabibat*’s rituals are tied to the physical space where they are performed. A pious act means one thing in a sacred space and something less elsewhere. Israeli disruptions have, therefore, been physical and spatial, strategically moving the *Murabibat* to less conspicuous locations and away from the sacred location.

I also develop several sub-themes: local culture, sacred calendars, and social media to a lesser degree. Beyond the common discursive themes (Chapter 4), the *Murabibat* have an intimate attachment to al-Aqsa Mosque that they articulate through the domestic image of ‘home.’ This, and the responsibility they feel to protect the Mosque for the sake of Muslims globally, are expressions of their local culture. The complications of evolving yearly holiday calendars is also a sub-theme. In the fall of 2015—when the primary action of this case study took place—Muslim and Jewish holidays nearly coincided. The concurrence increased tensions in the city and added to the complexity of the case. Social media is the final sub-theme. Confrontations between Israeli settlers, soldiers, and the *Murabibat* were often recorded and posted on social media. These recordings were viewed broadly and contributed to the mass-adoption of *Ribat* terminology.

I begin the chapter by exploring Israeli disruptions of the Status Quo and the social transformations occurring within Israel that have generated Palestinian fears of the destruction of their mosque. Next, I outline the genealogy of *ribat* as a religious and historical term, paying specific attention to why the term would have such resonance among Palestinians. I then look specifically at the rituals of the *Murabibat* at the

Haram al-Sharif, followed by a discussion of the choreography of disruption and improvisations between Israeli security, settlers, and *Murabitat*. The contentious choreography ultimately led to confrontations, suppression, and prohibition of the *Murabitat*. I then show how the *Murabitat* of al-Aqsa and their clashes with Israeli settlers led to societal-level changes in how Palestinians understand and articulate their faith. To conclude, I speculate about the future use of *ribat* language and its probable evolution.

My ethnographic research on the *Murabitat* took place from mid-2015 through early-2016. This note is important because my fieldwork coincided within the highly contentious period when Israel began placing restrictions on the *Murabitat* in mid-2015 and outlawed the group outright in late-2015. I observed the dynamic transformations first hand as they occurred.

Israeli Disruptions and Societal Transformations

Jerusalem's Muslims view the Israeli occupation that began in 1967 as the seminal and most expansive disruption to their religious rituals at the Haram al-Sharif. Since then, conflict at the holy site has been mediated through the *Status Quo*. The *Status Quo* is a de-facto *modus vivendi* between Israelis, Palestinians, and Jordanians regarding the Holy site.⁵⁴¹ From its inception, the Status Quo has been “the product of tacit pragmatism, not formal understandings, since Jordan and Israel officially remained at war.”⁵⁴² The Jordanian Waqf continued to administer the site while Israel took charge of access and security. Since the arrangement is de-facto, informal, and pragmatic, there has been little agreement about the specific form, content, or scope of the *Status Quo*. Each side has regularly accused the others of transgressing its roles and obligations—be the issue access or worship, sovereignty or security, administration or preservation. The result is a

⁵⁴¹ Yitzhak Reiter, "Jewish-Muslim Modus Vivendi at the Temple Mount/Al-Haram Al-Sharif since 1967," in *Jerusalem: A City and Its Future*, ed. Marshall J. Breger and Ora Ahimeir (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2002).

⁵⁴² International Crisis Group (ICG), "The Status of the Status Quo at Jerusalem's Holy Esplanade," 5.

tenuous and unstable situation, fueled most often by misunderstanding and misinformation. In this section, I argue that since 1967 Israel has disrupted the Status Quo on multiple occasions and in various ways. Beyond the actual disruptions, Israel has created a perception of further and impending disruptions through its rhetoric and action, the most extreme being the complete destruction of the mosque. Israeli disruptions are, therefore, both real and potential. These disruptions are the *Murabitats' raison d'être*. I frame this section's discussion loosely around the International Crisis Group's (ICG) report "The Status of the Status Quo at Jerusalem's Holy Esplanade," adding specific commentary and analysis where relevant. The ICG report centers its evaluation of the conflict at the Haram al-Sharif around three separate stages: "Initial Stability: 1967-1990s," "First Fractures (1992-2000)," and "Status Quo's Unraveling (2000-current)."

In the first period, "Initial Stability: 1967-1990s," the ICG author argues that aside from several discrete incidences, and over a dozen unsuccessful attempts to blow up the mosque, there were few violations of the Status Quo.⁵⁴³ While these dynamics belie any sense of stability, the report's case hinges on the lack of Jewish interest in controlling the compound. After gaining access for the first time in approximately 1900 years, Jewish religious authorities were preoccupied with a theological question: was it religiously appropriate for Jews to enter the compound? Would they, by entering, unwittingly desecrate the Holy of Holies? After deliberation, Rabbinic authorities decided that entry for Jews was forbidden. The prohibition explains why, today, all visitors who enter the compound pass the sign: "Announcement and Warning: According to Torah Law, entering the Temple Mount Area is strictly forbidden due to

⁵⁴³ A Zionist Christian setting fire to the Saladin's *minbar* in the Qibli Mosque in 1969; Israelis 'accidentally' tunneling under the compound and the Waqf filling the hole in 1981; an Israeli soldier opening fire on the mount killing a Waqf employee in 1982; and an incident where 20 Palestinians were killed and 150 wounded because Israel used live fire to disrupt a crowd throwing stone onto Jewish worships at the Wailing Wall in 1990.

the holiness of the site. - The Chief Rabbinate of Israel.”⁵⁴⁴ The broad consensus regarding the validity of prohibition kept most Jews away through the early 1990s. With time, however, the legislation was contested, and Jews began entering the compound more frequently. At this stage, the early Temple activists (whom I discuss shortly) “focused on quietly laying the basis for their ultimate agenda of building a new Temple.”⁵⁴⁵ These activists were on the fringes of Israeli society and focused mainly on creating artifacts for temple worship, studying long-neglected temple law, and drawing up plans for the eventual construction of the Temple.

While there have been occasional interruptions since 1967, both sides—Israelis and Jordanians—have agreed since 1967 that the Status Quo permits non-Muslims to visit the site. People of any (or no) faith are allowed to enter between 7:30 a.m. and 12:30 p.m. and from 1:30 to 2:30 p.m., Saturday through Thursday. These hours are typically low-traffic for Muslim presence on the compound since they have no overlap with Muslim prayer times. Visitors pass through Israeli security screening adjacent to the Wailing Wall Plaza and enter at the Moroccan Gate. They are then free to walk through the complex, although in recent years visitors have been forbidden from entering the physical structures of the sacred site.⁵⁴⁶

In the second period, “First Fractures (1992-2000),” the ICG report argues that the Oslo process changed the dynamics of the Status Quo. The coordination of public works and archaeology became more complicated because the Palestinian Authority (PA) had successfully wrestled some control of the site from the Jordanians. The most significant change occurred in 1996 when the *Waqf* ceased

⁵⁴⁴ For further analysis of the Rabbinate prohibition and ongoing debate about Jewish entry to the Temple Mount, see Yael Cohen, “The Political Role of the Israeli Chief Rabbinate in the Temple Mount Question,” *Jewish Political Studies Review* 11, no. 1-2 (1999); Motti Inbari, “Religious Zionism and the Temple Mount Dilemma - Key Trends,” *Israel Studies* 12, no. 2 (2007).

⁵⁴⁵ International Crisis Group (ICG), “The Status of the Status Quo at Jerusalem's Holy Esplanade,” 6.

⁵⁴⁶ Historically, non-Muslims were allowed to enter the physical structures. Previous visitors had committed acts of vandalism, larceny, and arson in the building, destroying historic and religious artifacts.

coordination with the Israeli Antiquities Authority after Israel opened the northern entrance to the Western Wall Tunnel which ran underground along the entire length of the Haram al-Sharif. The opening of the tunnel sparked protests throughout Jerusalem, the West Bank, and Gaza. Three Palestinians were killed and 20 injured; eleven Israeli police were wounded, too. The Oslo process also raised fears among Jewish religious groups that secular politicians would trade the compound for peace. To preempt such a concession, the Committee of Rabbis of Judea and Samaria declared that they would actively encourage Jews to enter the compound. In this period, Israel also began occasionally prohibiting entry for Palestinian Males 30-years and younger.

In 1996, another critical player entered the scene, Ra'ed Salah, the leader of the Northern Branch of the Islamic Movement of Israel.⁵⁴⁷ Salah initiated restoration projects in and around the Old City, most notably at the *Musalla al-Marwani* (prayer hall of caliph 'Abd al-Malik b. Marwan) on the Haram al-Sharif. The project aimed to give more space for worshipers during Muslim holidays, and Israel intensely criticized the project for slipshod disposal of antiquities and defying their authority.⁵⁴⁸ The project was arguably the most extensive restoration project on the compound in a century. And the Israeli case for Palestinian transgressions of the Status Quo is found here. Restoration became resistance.⁵⁴⁹

Beyond restoration, Sheikh Salah has also been a vocal critic of Israel and mobilizer of Muslim sentiment around the compound. He condemns Israeli archeological digs in and around the Haram al-Sharif

⁵⁴⁷ The Movement is referred to as the "Northern Branch" because it had split into two separate groups the same years. For details, see Issam Aburaiya, "The 1996 Split of the Islamic Movement in Israel: Between the Holy Text and Israeli-Palestinian Context," *International Journal of Politics, Culture, and Society* 17, no. 3 (2004).

⁵⁴⁸ Raphael Israeli, "The Islamic Movement in Israel," *Jerusalem Letter*, no. 416 (1999); Craig Larkin and Michael Dumper, "In Defense of Al-Aqsa: The Islamic Movement inside Israel and the Battle for Jerusalem," *The Middle East Journal* 66, no. 1 (2012): 40.

⁵⁴⁹ For a detailed study of the Islamic Movement in Israel, see: "In Defense of Al-Aqsa: The Islamic Movement inside Israel and the Battle for Jerusalem," *The Middle East Journal* 66, no. 1 (2012); T. Rosmer, "Resisting 'Israelization': The Islamic Movement in Israel and the Realization of Islamization, Palestinization and Arabization," *Journal of Islamic Studies* 23, no. 3 (2012).

which, he claims, undermine the foundations of the holy site. He invites local and international Muslim groups to visit the sites to see for themselves.⁵⁵⁰ Since 2001, his movement claims to have coordinated and subsidized some 2 million visits to the site.⁵⁵¹ Salah has also hosted an annual festival called “*Al-Aqsa Endangered*,” bringing some 50,000 supporters to *Umm al-Fahim*, a Galilean village and the symbolic heart of the Northern Branch of the Islamic Movement. Because of his intense activism and rhetoric, Sheikh Salah has earned informal titles such as: “Sheikh of al-Aqsa” and the “Palestinian Mayor of Jerusalem.”⁵⁵² Sheikh Salah’s involvement has substantially changed the Status Quo in its own right.

The ICG report identify one final stage, the “Status Quo’s Unraveling (2000-current).” The departure-point for this stage was Ariel Sharon’s visit to the Haram al-Sharif in 2000. He was accompanied by over a thousand security guards, and the provocative act ignited the Second *Intifada* (See Chapter 4). From this point, a series of disruptions and reactions led to a deteriorating situation on the compound: Jews and non-Muslims were forbidden from the compound from 2001-2003; Israel eliminated the Palestinian Authority’s role in the compound’s administration; Ariel Sharon unilaterally restored Jewish and non-Muslim entrance to the site in 2003 without Jordanian coordination or agreement; Jordan, in response, began forbidden non-Muslims from entering the buildings; Israel no longer coordinated with Jordan about the size and rate of Jewish and non-Muslim groups, allowing larger groups to enter with more frequency; Israel began allowing Jews dressed in military fatigues to enter; Israel increased supervision of public works and archeology in 2006-2007, making maintenance work a major challenge for the Jordanians; Israel began limiting the number of Muslims through a ‘dilution’ policy; Israel blocked specific Muslim worshipers for security concerns and blocked all Muslim

⁵⁵⁰ Raphael Israeli, “The Islamic Movement in Israel,” *Jerusalem Letter*, no. 416 (1999)

⁵⁵¹ Larkin and Dumper, “In Defense of Al-Aqsa: The Islamic Movement inside Israel and the Battle for Jerusalem,” 40.

⁵⁵² “In Defense of Al-Aqsa: The Islamic Movement inside Israel and the Battle for Jerusalem,” 37.

entry to the compound three times between 2003-2012; in 2013-2014, Israel blocked Muslim entry to the compound 30 separate days and also began imposing specific age restrictions. These developments—taken together—constitute multiple and major disruptions to Muslim worship and access to their holy site. The ICG report demonstrates that disruptions have been ongoing and increasingly invasive since 1967. I now shift analysis to transformations within Israeli society that point toward further disruptions in the future.

Jewish visitors to the Haram al-Sharif include far-right groups who actively advocate for a change in the Status Quo.⁵⁵³ Initially, these groups focused on quietly studying long-neglected temple law, creating the materials necessary for Temple worship, and drawing up plans to build the third Temple. In recent years, however, they have developed substantial ties with far-right-wing political factions, which, historically, were on the political fringes (and thus ignored) but have now assimilated into mainstream Israeli society and joined the coalition government. Their positions are deeply problematic. Israel's deputy Foreign Minister and Likud member, Tzipi Hotovely, for example, was quoted in a *'Times of Israel'* news article in October 2015 saying, "I think it's [The Temple Mount] the center of Israeli sovereignty, the capital of Israel, the holiest place for the Jewish people. It's my dream to see the Israeli flag flying on the Temple Mount."⁵⁵⁴ Young Knesset members use bold assertions about their plans for the Temple Mount to build popularity among their constituency. Deputy speaker of the Knesset and Likud lawmaker, Oren Hazan, explained his vision, thus: "If the day comes and I have the opportunity to lead the country, not to mention become the prime minister, I will build the Temple on the Temple Mount." When reporters followed up with questions about demolishing al-Aqsa Mosque and the Dome of the Rock, he responded, "It would not be responsible at this point in time to tell you how we would do it, but I will say it clear and

⁵⁵³ Two groups being The Temple Institute and Ateret Cohanim.

⁵⁵⁴ Staff, "Deputy Fm: I Dream of Israeli Flag Flying over Temple Mount," *The Times of Israel* (October 26, 2015), <http://www.timesofisrael.com/deputy-fm-i-dream-of-israeli-flag-flying-over-temple-mount/>.

loud: When I have the opportunity to do it, I will.”⁵⁵⁵ Beyond the political grandstanding of young Israeli politicians, more substantive evidence exists, demonstrating the Israeli government’s support for changing the Status Quo at the sacred site.

The Israeli government directly funds organizations whose explicit purpose is to rebuild the Temple. The Temple Institute, for example, received 282,000 ILS (roughly \$80,000) from the Ministry of Education and 134,000 (roughly \$38,000) from the Ministry of Culture in one year.⁵⁵⁶ The Temple Institute is forthright with its intention to rebuild the Temple. The ‘Statement of Principles’ on the organization’s website illustrates:

The Temple Institute is dedicated to all aspects of the Divine commandment for Israel to build a house for G-d's presence, the Holy Temple, on Mount Moriah in Jerusalem. The range of the Institute's involvement with this concept includes education, research, activism, and actual preparation. Our goal is firstly, to restore Temple consciousness and reactivate these "forgotten" commandments. We hope that by doing our part, we can participate in the process that will lead to the Holy Temple becoming a reality once more.⁵⁵⁷

The group’s vision disregards the Status Quo completely. Such overt disregard justifies Palestinian fear. Reconstruction of the Temple can only be completed by first destroying the al-Aqsa Mosque.

These groups also lobby for increasing the number of Jewish visitors to the site. As early as 2013, the Israeli Knesset began discussing legislation to permit Jewish prayer on the site, something explicitly forbidden by the Status Quo.⁵⁵⁸ They advocate for the restoration of Jewish religious practices; some have even attempted to

⁵⁵⁵ Dan Cohen and David Sheen, "‘When I Have the Opportunity to Do It, I Will’: Likud Lawmaker Vows to Demolish Al-Aqsa Mosque," *Mandoweiss* (February 29, 2016), <http://mondoweiss.net/2016/02/when-i-have-the-opportunity-to-do-it-i-will-likud-lawmaker-vows-to-demolish-al-aqsa-mosque/>.

⁵⁵⁶ Staff, "Report: State Funds Groups That Advocate Building Third Temple," *The Jerusalem Post* (August 4, 2013), <http://www.jpost.com/Diplomacy-and-Politics/Report-State-funds-groups-that-advocate-building-Third-Temple-321990>.

⁵⁵⁷ The Temple Institute, "The Temple Institute," <https://www.templeinstitute.org>.

⁵⁵⁸ Khalid Amayreh, "Jews and Muslims to Share Al-Aqsa Mosque?" *al-Jazeera* (November 13, 2013), <http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/features/2013/11/jews-muslims-share-al-aqsa-mosque-201311184111359951.html>.

perform prayers on the site.⁵⁵⁹ One key activist—and Knesset Member—is Yehuda Glick (pictured below). He is known for his relentless advocacy for Jewish prayer on the Temple Mount and the construction of the Temple.⁵⁶⁰



*Yehuda Glick showing a picture of the Third Temple to be built in place of the Dome of the Rock.
Photo Credit (Abunimeh 2014).*

While Israel regularly rehearses the rhetoric of supporting the Status Quo, financing institutes whose explicit aim is rebuilding the Temple and having known advocates for such activities serve as Knesset members reveal the government's position for what it is—blatant hypocrisy. The Temple Mount has clearly been upgraded within Israeli society as a national-Jewish site.⁵⁶¹ The potential for further

⁵⁵⁹ The YouTube Chanel titled “The Temple Institute” has many videos showing Jews praying on the Temple Mount. See, for example: The Temple Institute, "Prayer on the Temple Mount: A Moving Glimpse," *YouTube* (June 5, 2013a), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=StoE7jPqh1c>.; "Moshe Feiglin Returns to the Temple Mount." *YouTube* (February 20, 2014a), https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_Zaf4NpP8Mc.

⁵⁶⁰ Glick is also well known for surviving an assassination attempt in 2014. For details, see Yardena Schwartz, "An Interview with Israel's Most Wanted Man, Rabbi Yehuda Glick," *Tablet* (December 10, 2014), <http://www.tabletmag.com/jewish-news-and-politics/187546/yehuda-glick>.

⁵⁶¹ Yitzhak Reiter, "Narratives of Jerusalem and Its Sacred Compound," *Israel Studies* 18, no. 2 (2013).

disruptions on the site is only increasing. On several occasions, I heard Yusuf Natcheh, the director of Tourism and Architecture at al-Aqsa Mosque, relate a telling experience with an Israeli journalist. He asked the journalist, "When do you want to build the Third Temple?" He replied simply, "We want to build the third Temple in the minds of the people first. If there is conviction in the idea, the other arrangements will get easier."⁵⁶²

Seen in this light, Israeli disruptions to Muslims' religious practices at the Haram al-Sharif are more substantive than occasional entry restrictions. Disruptions are linked to broader transformations within Israeli society. As Israel leans further to the right politically and as Temple advocates gain further prominence in government positions, the potential for further disruptions becomes exponential. Palestinian fears are warranted. If Jerusalem's Muslims do not resist Israeli encroachment on the site, occasional Israeli disruptions will lead to complete destruction of the Sacred Space. Moreover, Palestinians in Jerusalem have grown deeply cynical about the real-world viability of obtaining an independent Palestinian State with East Jerusalem as its capital. They are painfully aware of the Zionist enterprise's strength, the incapacity of their political leadership, and the unwillingness of international stakeholders to play a decisive role in resolving the conflict. Their hopes for national independence are slim. These factors have created a fertile ground for rearticulating their presence in the city and resistance toward Israeli settler-colonial practices. This is the disruptive background of the *Murabitats'* ritual improvisations.

Genealogies of *Ribat* at the Haram al-Sharif

Why would the notion of *ribat* have such resonance among Palestinians? The answer is found, generally, in the discursive lexicon of the Islamic tradition, and, specifically, in its historical use in Palestine.

⁵⁶² He also repeated the story for an al-Jazeera program titled "Jerusalem Resists alone." mata turyd an tabny al-haykil al-thalith? 'ajabu bikul basita, nuryd an nabny al-haykil al-thalith fi 'uqul al-nas awalan. idha 'amalyan fi iqna' bi al-fikra ama al-tartybat al-ukhra rah yasahalu. Ahmed al-Sheikh, "al-Quds Wahadha Tuqawim—Sira' al-Hawiya J1," al-Shahed: al-Jazeera Arabic (2015), Min.17, Sec.03, <https://bit.ly/2P6jkxm>.

In this section, I argue that *ribat*'s distinct genealogical feature—being both implicitly flexible and firmly fixed in the Islamic discursive tradition—and its historical deployment in Palestine have made it an apt mechanism for the Murabitat to articulate their improvised responses to Israeli disruptions at the Haram al-Sharif.

Ribat is the noun of the third form of the trilateral root *Ra Ba Ta*, meaning to tie, attach, or fasten. Hans Wehr, in his widely used Arabic-English dictionary, defines the term: “to be lined up, posted, stationed (troops); to line up, take up positions; to be moored (ship); to move into fighting positions.”⁵⁶³ The term *Murabitin* is the masculine plural form of the active participle of the same form and has the same meaning. *Murabitin* protect what is being aggressed upon.⁵⁶⁴ *Murabitat* (*feminine plural*) are the women who do the same thing.

The notion of *ribat* is firmly rooted in the Islamic theological tradition, occurring in both the Qur'an⁵⁶⁵ and *Hadith* literature.⁵⁶⁶ The term also has been used in various ways across time and space. In its earliest applications, *ribat* described towns on the frontiers of the Islamic empire that needed to be defended from attack. Cities bordering the Byzantine empire in the Anatolia region such as Beirut and, more importantly, towns such as Tarsus, Antakya, and Aleppo were defended from Byzantine attack.⁵⁶⁷ Later, however, the term was used differently.

⁵⁶³ Hans Wehr, "Rabata," in *The Hans Wehr Dictionary of Modern Written Arabic* (Ithica, NY: Spoken Language Services, Inc., 1994).

⁵⁶⁴ Interestingly, the Israeli watchdog website Palestine Media Watch (PMW) translates the term as 'religious war.' The differences between 'religious war' and 'standing guard' are profound. Even in defining terms, the issue of representation has stark political connotations. Palestinian Media Watch (PMW), "Mahmoud Al-Habbash," *Palestinian Media Watch*, <http://palwatch.org/main.aspx?fi=859>.

⁵⁶⁵ The verse with a similar connotation being Al-'Imran 3:200. Three additional verses have related meanings: al-Anfal 8:11, al-Kahif 18:14, and al-Qasas 28:10. In al-Anfal 8:60, the term means to tie up a horse.

⁵⁶⁶ For a detailed exposition of the Hadith literature concerning *ribat* from al-Aqsa Mosque, see al-Masjid al-Aqsa, "Dars al-Thulatha' min al-Masjid al-Aqsa al-Mubarak lil-Shaykh Khalid al-Maghrabi—03/18/2014m—17 Jimadi al-'Ula: Ba'd Ahadiyth al-Ribat," *YouTube* (March 8, 2014), www.youtube.com/watch?v=hLffJ8nzsSw&feature=em-upload_owner.

⁵⁶⁷ David Cook, *Understanding Jihad* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2005), 16; Feryal Salem, *The Emergence of Early Sufi Piety and Sunni Scholasticism* (Leiden: Brill, 2016), 90.

The Almoravid dynasty (1091-1145) on the Western frontier of the Islamic empire used the term in this offensive way. The city of Rabat derives its name from the concept of *ribat* (the city was first called Ribat and the spelling was later changed), and the Almoravids used it as a base for launching attacks.⁵⁶⁸ Here, the term describes aggression. Later still, *ribat* became associated with various Sufi groups who called their guest houses and hospices *Ribats*. This is the primary way the notion was used in Jerusalem historically (as I discussed in Chapter 5). In a personal interview, Yusuf Natcheh affirmed this fact and also explained that the idea of protecting the city and al-Aqsa Mosque were present then, too, but their historical and contemporary uses were substantially different.⁵⁶⁹

This brief overview, thus, illustrates the term's broad and diverse usage through time and space within the Islamic discursive tradition. On this account, Jacqueline Chabbi, the author of the *ribat* entry for the Encyclopedia of Islam, explains: "The word [*ribat*] needs to be constantly related to a context and a chronology since the sense has been very evolutive."⁵⁷⁰ Such dynamic usage reveals how *ribat* is both flexible in its application and firmly fixed in the Islamic tradition. The term has been used to describe defensive positions, acts of aggression, and the guesthouses of Sufi brotherhoods.

On the contemporary landscape, such dynamism makes the term particularly attractive to Islamic groups looking for vocabulary to articulate and mobilize support for their political objectives. In the 1970s, for example, the pro-Nasser pan-Arab political party in Lebanon

⁵⁶⁸ The name of the dynasty "Almoravid" also derives from *al-murabitun*, the active participle of *ribat* in the plural form. For more information, see Nazeer Ahmed, "Murabitun," in *History of Islam: An Encyclopedia of Islamic History*, ed. Nazeer Ahmed (2001).

⁵⁶⁹ Personal Interview, Old City Jerusalem, July 11, 2016.

⁵⁷⁰ Jacqueline Chabbi, "Ribat," in *Encyclopedia of Islam 2, VIII*, ed. P. Bearman, et al. (Leiden: Brill, 1997).

called its military wing *al-Mourabitoun*.⁵⁷¹ In 2014, a new Islamic group formed as a merger between *al-Qaida* in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) and the *al-Mulathameen* Brigade. The group named itself *al-Murabitun* and experts fear it is the newest branch of the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS).⁵⁷² These two examples illustrate how *ribat's* flexibility and firm-rootedness in the Islamic traditions have allowed Muslims to utilize it for various contemporary political proposes.

The resonance of *ribat* language among Jerusalem's Muslims has also drawn from the term's historical use in Palestine. Aside from its previously discussed association with Sufi institutions, the notion of *ribat* appear in Palestine as early as the Umayyad period. Mu'awiya b. Abi Sufyan, the fifth caliph, fortified Muslim rule in Palestine against Byzantine sea invasion by setting up towns—called *ribats*—along the Mediterranean coast.⁵⁷³ *Ribat* language is also found in Palestine during the Crusader period. When Ascalon fell to the Frankish invaders in 1099 in the last battle of the First Crusade, for example, the Crusader armies failed to maintain a robust military presence in the city and thus allowed Fatimid forced to return. Small-scale skirmishes then broke out between Crusader and Fatimid forces, and Muslim leaders used *hadiths*, enumerating the religious rewards of *ribat*, to encourage and mobilize support for the ongoing defense of the city. Similar slogans were repeated when Napoleon invaded and later when the British occupied Palestine.

While pinpointing the term's first contemporary instance in Palestine is difficult, several examples give a sense of the its emergence. First, Yitzhak Reiter has noted several cases where non-

⁵⁷¹ When the party was established, most members where Shi'a. It was only in 1983 that the group became very Sunni, and lost its popularity first among Shi'a and soon after among Sunnis. For more information, see Ziad Hafez, "Independent Nasserite Movement: Interview with Ziad Hafez," *Middle East Research and Information Project* 61(1977).

⁵⁷² Raphaël Lefèvre, "Is the Islamic State on the Rise in North Africa?," *The Journal of North African Studies* 19, no. 5 (2014).

⁵⁷³ Yumna Masarwa, "From a Word of God to Archaeological Monuments: A Historical-Archaeological Study of the Umayyad Ribats of Palestine" (PhD diss., Princeton University, 2006); Hassan S. Khalilieh, "The Ribat of Arsuf and the Coastal Defence System in Early Islamic Palestine," *Journal of Islamic Studies* 19, no. 2 (2008).

Palestinian Muslims have used the notion 'land of *ribat*' (*ard ribat*) to describe Palestine.⁵⁷⁴ Second, the Islamic Resistance Movement (Hamas) produced several leaflets referring to Palestine as the 'land of *ribat*' (*ard al-ribat*) and Muslims as *Murabitoun* during the First Intifada.⁵⁷⁵ Finally, Yasser Arafat, the deceased chairman of the Palestinian Liberation Organization, was known for quoting the *Hadith* which linked the people of Jerusalem to the notion of *ribat*.⁵⁷⁶ In each example, *ribat* conveys the idea that since Palestine belongs to Muslims, some form of resistance toward Israel and its occupation are appropriate and necessary.

According to several of my interlocutors, however, the notion of *ribat* only gained traction among Palestinians after the Ibrahimi Mosque massacre of 1994.⁵⁷⁷ Baruch Goldstein, an American-Israeli extremist associated with the terrorist group Meir Kahane, entered the Ibrahimi Mosque in Hebron and opened fire on Muslim worshipers, killing 29 and wounding 125. Afterward, Israel imposed limitations on Muslim worship at the site and implemented security screening measures for all entering Muslims. Part of the physical structure of the mosque was cordoned off for continuous Jewish worship (except 10-days-a-year for Muslim holidays).⁵⁷⁸ Israel justified the measures under the pretext of restoring

⁵⁷⁴ Reiter, *Jerusalem and Its Role in Islamic Solidarity*, 33, 120.

⁵⁷⁵ Shaul Mishal and Reuben Aharoni, *Speaking Stones: Communiques from the Intifada Underground* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1994). Mishal and Aharoni published approximately one-third of the pamphlets produced during the first Intifada. Of the 25 leaflets published and accredited to Hamas, 15 include the terms *ribat* or *Murabitoun*. A cursory examination revealed that the frequency of occurrence decreased with time. It is also noteworthy that the original Hamas Charter only contains vague references to the notion of *ribat* and *murabitoun*. When the terms are mentioned, they only appear in quoted material from Hadith literature. The authors of the Hamas Charter saw no reason to include or expound upon these notions. See, Hamas, "The Covenant of the Islamic Resistance Movement," (1988).

⁵⁷⁶ One Youtube video has been posted of him citing a Hadith which says the people of Jerusalem are in a *ribat*. Yasser Arafat, "Abu 'Ammar Yassir 'Arafat (Wa Hum fi Ribat ila Yawm al-Din)," *YouTube* (2012), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y0JTaxDJECS>.

⁵⁷⁷ Personal Interview Qafr 'Aqab, East Jerusalem, September 13, 2015; Personal Interview al-Ram, East Jerusalem, May 2015; Personal Interview, Old City Jerusalem, February 10, 2016.

⁵⁷⁸ For a detailed discussion of the transformations at the Cave of the Patriarchs, see Dumper, *Jerusalem Unbound: Geography, History, and the Future of the Holy City*, 137-42.

calm at the site. The Muslim community saw these spatial and temporal divisions as egregious violations of their religious rights to the site and began using the term *ribat* to express their disapproval and resolve to guard the Mosque from further violations. What transpired in the aftermath of the tragedy is, therefore, significant both because of the term's emergence and because Israel used the event to consolidate and expand its role at the site.

While Palestinian religious and sentimental connections to the Ibrahimi Mosque are strong, they pale in comparison to the attachment Muslims feel to al-Aqsa Mosque. Given the persistent encroachments of the Israeli settler-colonial project in the city observed throughout this thesis, *ribat* quickly moved from Hebron to Jerusalem. Michael Dumper draws a clear parallel between the Hebron events and the emerging scenario in Jerusalem, labeling the development the “Hebronization of Jerusalem,” whereby he means:

...the process by which the protection and development of Jewish holy sites also becomes the vehicle or bridgehead for further encroachments on Muslim property in Jerusalem by the Israeli state. In this process, these sites are first securitized by the army and then become a platform for Israeli settlement activity in the vicinity.⁵⁷⁹

Having covered the details of Israeli settler-colonial project elsewhere, I need not repeat the material. The new dimension here is that Palestinians have watched what happened in Hebron and they fear the same thing will happen in Jerusalem.

Sheikh Ra'ed Salah, discussed earlier, has also contributed to the broad-scale adoption of the term. He has used the term to mobilize support for his efforts in Jerusalem. And in a broad sense, it could be argued that he understands all of his activities in Jerusalem as *ribat*. Salah has also founded two organizations called the *Murabitin* and *Murabitat*, subsidiaries of the Islamic Movement of Israel. Israeli News Media claims that these organizations have been used to pay Muslim men and women up to 4,000 ILS (approx. \$1,000) a month to actively engage in *ribat*, alleging that funds were provided by Hamas and the Gulf States. My Palestinian interlocutors disputed these claims. Some

⁵⁷⁹ *Jerusalem Unbound: Geography, History, and the Future of the Holy City*, 139.

argued that the stipends covered no more than the cost of a meal and bus ticket. Others insisted the groups were merely informal networks, not organizations.⁵⁸⁰ In the fall of 2015, Israeli sources estimated there were more than 1,000 *Murabitat* and hundreds of men, *Murabitoun*.⁵⁸¹ One expert close to the Israeli security establishment claimed, more realistically, that Israel had evidence of 52 recruits associated with the Islamic Movement who received money, and that these women then recruited another 70 women from East Jerusalem.⁵⁸² As the numbers demonstrate, estimates vary significantly. Regardless how the *Murabitin* and *Murabitat* are defined organizationally, how much funding they received, or how many participated in the activities, the Islamic Movement of Israel has clearly worked to promote *ribat* in Jerusalem.

Thus far, I have shown that *ribat*'s distinct genealogical features —being both flexible and firmly fixed in the Islamic discursive tradition— have made it an apt mechanism for the *Murabitat* to articulate their improvised responses to Israeli disruptions to the Status Quo at the Haram al-Sharif. I turn now to the improvised discourses and practices of the *Murabitat*.

Rituals for God and Resistance

The *Murabitat* at the Haram al-Sharif are typically older women or youth. My interlocutors accounted for these demographics in two ways: seniors and youth tend to have more free-time and are, therefore, more available to protect the mosque; and more significantly, Israeli forces have typically treated women and older people less severely than men.

⁵⁸⁰ In its overview of the phenomenon, al-Jazeera Arabic explains that “the Islamic Movement confirms that the *Murabitat* are not an organization as the occupation claims. Tickets and enrollment cards are not granted for a *Murabit* or *Murabita* because *ribat* in the Islamic religion is considered worship comparable with prayer.” al-Jazeera, “Murabitu al-Aqsa,” (September 16, 2015c), <https://goo.gl/RqYcg3>.

⁵⁸¹ Shlomi Eldar, “Who Are the Temple Mount's Mourabitoun?” *Al-Monitor* (September 18, 2015), <http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2015/09/israel-mourabitun-temple-mount-compound-settlers-islamists.html#>; Gili Cohen, “Israel Bans Two Muslim Activist Groups from Temple Mount,” *Haaretz* (September 9, 2015), <http://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/1.675329>.

⁵⁸² CITpax, “Options for Jerusalem & the Holy Sites.”

As the subsequent section unfortunately illustrates, gender and age did little to hinder Israeli troops from treating these women forcefully.

The *Murabitat* view their activity as a work for God—“Ribat is a work for God. It is a pure work for God.”⁵⁸³ The *Murabitat* regularly repeated the refrain in my interviews and interactions with them. Other resources I reviewed often included some element of this notion. The *Murabitat*, therefore, primarily understood *ribat* as a form of worship and a religious ritual. The *Murabitat* have drawn from the broad symbolic and discursive reservoir of Islam and its specific historical application in Palestine to understand what it means to practice their faith appropriately as the previous section illustrated. Their intention is to please God with their activities. To emphasize their exclusive aim to please God, the *Murabitat* explained that *ribat* was not for family, community, or nation, but for God alone. Framing *ribat* in this way was significant because it implied a minimization of other dynamics contributing to the condensation of these women’s identity.

The *Murabitat* often acknowledged that the practice had a particular political context, but that it also transcended it. Several interlocutors went so far as to deny the political context outright; their dismissal, doubtless, highlighting their sincere self-perception of proper pious comportment. One friend, illustrating how the practice transcended the political circumstances, explained, “Practically, whenever the constraints are released [at the Haram al-Sharif], the situation relaxes and people come without prompting. The issue is an issue of faith.”⁵⁸⁴ That people come whether or not problems occur illustrates how their faith commitments transcend the political circumstances. This same friend went on to explain that Muslims who exhibit patience in light of the daily frustrations of life under occupation could also be understood as practicing *ribat*. This generous interpretation illustrates how broad and flexible the notion could be. My aim in this section, however, is not to argue whether or not *ribat* is *really*

⁵⁸³ Kelam Mubashir, “Kelam Mubasir Aydesidava—Murabitat Maqdasiyyat fi al-Masjid al-Aqsa,” *YouTube* (November 12, 2014), https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SAe_-AQbwfU.

⁵⁸⁴ Mustafa Abu Sway, Interview, East Jerusalem, February 2014.

about religion or *really* about politics. My point is that *ribat* is a discursive mechanism, framing specific religious rituals at the Haram al-Sharif. And as a religious ritual, *ribat* is laden with symbolic meaning, carrying with it the fundamental properties of rituals: condensation of meaning, multivocality, and ambiguity. The following discussion reveals how *ribat* is really about several things and that the meaning people attribute to the practice can only be understood within the context of disruptions and improvisations on the Haram al-Sharif.

Ribat takes various forms as a religious ritual. First, the *Murabitat* explained that *ribat* could be understood as a form of *i'tikaf*. *I'tikaf* is the practice of spending extended amounts of time in a mosque for the sake of prayer, meditation, scripture reading, and devotion. The practice is non-compulsory but viewed favorably. Its defining element is the intention to dedicate oneself to God. Jerusalemites practice *i'tikaf* most widely during the final ten days of Ramadan when there are increased blessings upon religious practices (See Chapter 6). In this sense, *i'tikaf* and *ribat* are similar: both have the explicit aim of dedicating one's time to God. The two differ in that *ribat* includes the intention of guarding the mosque against an external threat whereas *i'tikaf* does not.

Second, and related, *ribat* at the Haram al-Sharif is associated with *masatib al-ilm*. *Masatib al-'ilm* is the gathering of a group of Muslims in the Haram al-Sharif to study and discuss sacred texts, including the Qur'an, *Hadith*, *Sunna*, and biographies of the prophet. The *Murabitat* of al-Aqsa Mosque see *masatib al-'ilm* as one of their primary activities. The practice derives its name from the stone structures in the Haram al-Sharif courtyard. A *mistaba* (pl. *masatib*) is an outdoor stone platform. In English, this practice is commonly known as 'learning circles' and is sometimes referred to as such—*halaqat 'ilmiyya*—in Arabic. The practice has historical prescience. While there is little consensus regarding when the activity emerged—some say Imam Al-Ghazali started them in the 10th century,⁵⁸⁵ others say they didn't begin

⁵⁸⁵ al-Jazeera, "Masatib al-'Ilm bi al-Aqsa Tatasada li-Muhawalat Iqtihamihi," (August 17, 2015b), <https://goo.gl/sDrASv>.

until the Ottoman period⁵⁸⁶—the circles have, nevertheless, been a phenomenon on the Haram al-Sharif for centuries. Even before the *Murabitat* terminology became popular, leading Palestinian Jerusalemites, such as the late Faisal al-Husseini, advocated the promotion of learning circles at al-Aqsa Mosque as a constructive way to preserve the Palestinian and Islamic character of the city.⁵⁸⁷ Today, the groups range from informal gatherings, with several friends sitting together to study, to formalized educational tracks with lecturers and trained teachers.⁵⁸⁸ In some cases, certificates of participation and accomplishment are awarded. In one interview, Muneeb, a *murabit*, explained that the learning circles developed to prevent the *Murabitat* from sitting around idly as they protected the mosque. Since some of the women participating in *ribat* were trained teachers, they took on responsibility for teaching the others.⁵⁸⁹ Whether or not these groups produce substantial religious scholarship is beside the point, those who participate in the ritual have a shared perception of its religious benefit and historical precedence. As this study's typology of ritual explains, rituals consolidate symbolic meaning by forging links between the past and the present so that people experience the ritual's performance authentically. The contemporary application of the *masatib al-'ilm* and the improvised logic of using the circles for educational purposes (as opposed to idly sitting around) illustrates the dynamic and improvisational nature of the practice.

Learning circles are not necessarily round as the term may imply; rather, they are often dense huddles as the following picture illustrates. These learning circles are visible to the public eye. Anyone who enters the Haram al-Sharif during visiting hours sees multiple groups sitting together, reciting the Qur'an, discussing religious matters, or praying

⁵⁸⁶ Mubashir, "Kalam Mubasir Aydesidava—Murabitat Maqdasiyyat fi al-Masjid al-Aqsa," Min.1 Sec.45.

⁵⁸⁷ al-Husseini was a member of the Supreme Muslim Council in Jerusalem and the Palestinian Authority's Minister for Jerusalem Affairs. Dumper, *Jerusalem Unbound: Geography, History, and the Future of the Holy City*, 121.

⁵⁸⁸ Significantly, all the news articles I read about the certification programs have been taken down, presumably by Israeli authorities.

⁵⁸⁹ Personal Interview, Jerusalem Old City, February 12, 2016.

corporately. Groups are always divided along gender lines. Men's groups are typically located in the open spaces between the Dome of the Rock and the Qibli Mosque, with some close to the *Bab al-Rahma* (the Mercy Gate) on the west side of the compound. They sit in plastic chairs in the shade of the trees. The women primarily congregate in one spot to the right (south) of the path leading from the *Bab al-Magharbi* to the Qibli Mosque (pictured below). The women sit near a small structure known as the Yusuf Agha's Dome which also doubles as an information office for al-Aqsa Mosque.⁵⁹⁰ As time passes, the women move their chairs to stay in the shade the building provides.



*Women participating in ribat on the Haram al-Sharif.
Photo credit (al-Jazeera 2015b).*

Third, the *Murabitat* of al-Aqsa have connected the idea of *ribat* to the Mosque's status as a sacred space. Beyond regularly citing the theological and historical points of Jerusalem's sacredness that I discussed at length in Chapter 4, my interlocutors conveyed the sacredness of the mosque with three specific analogies, adding nuance to their perception of the mosque's sacredness. First, one *Murabita* explained that al-Aqsa is the third holiest mosque like the third-born child of a family—each child is an inseparable part of the family regardless of their birth-order.⁵⁹¹ Al-Aqsa's position as third-holiest in no

⁵⁹⁰ PASSIA, "A Guide to Al-Aqsa Mosque: Al-Haram Ash-Sharif," 27.

⁵⁹¹ Interview, Mariam, February 10, 2016.

way mitigates its significance. Second, they related the sacredness of the mosque to the domestic image of a home. The *Murabitat* regularly referred to the mosque as ‘our house.’ In one group interview, Amina and Mariam explained:

Amina—It’s not literal like it’s a house that we live in. But, metaphorically, it has meaning for us—more than anything else. Isn’t someone’s house the most important thing for them? For us, too. It is the most important thing for us.

Mariam—When you want to pray, where do you do this? You go to the house of God. This is God’s house. It’s so important that it’s the house of God. You pray there. You worship and you socialize in it. You relax in it. Your spirit rests in it.⁵⁹²

These comments weave together several sub-themes. Al-Aqsa is a sacred space in a metaphorical sense like that of a home. It has meaning and personal value. The mosque is home in the sense that people derive value by sharing the space with fellow worshipers. And it is home in that God’s presence resides in it. After reflection, I noticed that women—more than men—referred to the mosque in these terms. Men agreed that, yes, the mosque was God’s house, but they did not make associations with the domestic images the way women did. In another sense, the discourse of ‘home’ could also exemplify these women’s intimate connection to the mosque. The birth-order analogy could also be understood as an extension of the same close connection the *Murabitat* have with the mosque.

The third analogy the *Murabitat* used to convey the sacredness of the place was directed at me: “How would you—as a Christian—respond if soldiers prevented you from entering the Church of the Holy Sepulcher?”⁵⁹³ They assumed I would be outraged. They were appealing to a broad and transferable perception of how people should be able to freely access and worship in their sacred sites. What gave Israel the right to block them from their sacred space?

The *Murabitat* were keenly aware of Israeli disruptions to the Status quo and the broader transformations occurring in Israeli society.

⁵⁹² Interview, February 10, 2016 Old City, Jerusalem.

⁵⁹³ Interview, February 10, 2016 Old City, Jerusalem.

If they did not guard the mosque, it would be lost. The *Murabitat* regularly used phrases like, ‘al-Aqsa is empty,’ and ‘Jerusalem resists alone.’⁵⁹⁴ They were afraid of the ‘the Judaization of Jerusalem,’⁵⁹⁵ and they spoke of the potential spatial and temporal division of the mosque.⁵⁹⁶ One morning while sitting in the Bab Hutta public park discussing the *Murabitat’s* fears that Israel wanted to destroy al-Aqsa, Muneeb pulled out his phone and showed me pictures he had recently taken. They were of paintings being sold on Cardo Street in the Jewish Quarter of the Old City. What he showed me was astounding: a picture of the Haram al-Sharif with the Dome of the Rock conspicuously absent and a Jewish Temple built in its place. I went to the Cardo street that same day to take my own pictures. Here is one:



*Painting with temple replacing the Dome of the Rock outside a shop on the Cardo Street of the Jewish Quarter in Jerusalem’s Old City.
Personal photo, February 12, 2016*

While the discourse of the ‘Judaization of Jerusalem’ was not exclusive to the *Murabitat*, it galvanized their participation. The *Murabitat*

⁵⁹⁴ *al-quds tuqawim wahadha*

⁵⁹⁵ *tahwyd al-quds*

⁵⁹⁶ *taqsiym zamany wa makany*

view it as their responsibility to counter the growing emphasis within Israeli society of rebuilding the temple by affirming the Islamic identity of the Haram al-Sharif and being physically present in the compound. In the following section, I discuss what happens when Israeli settlers enter the Islamic holy site.

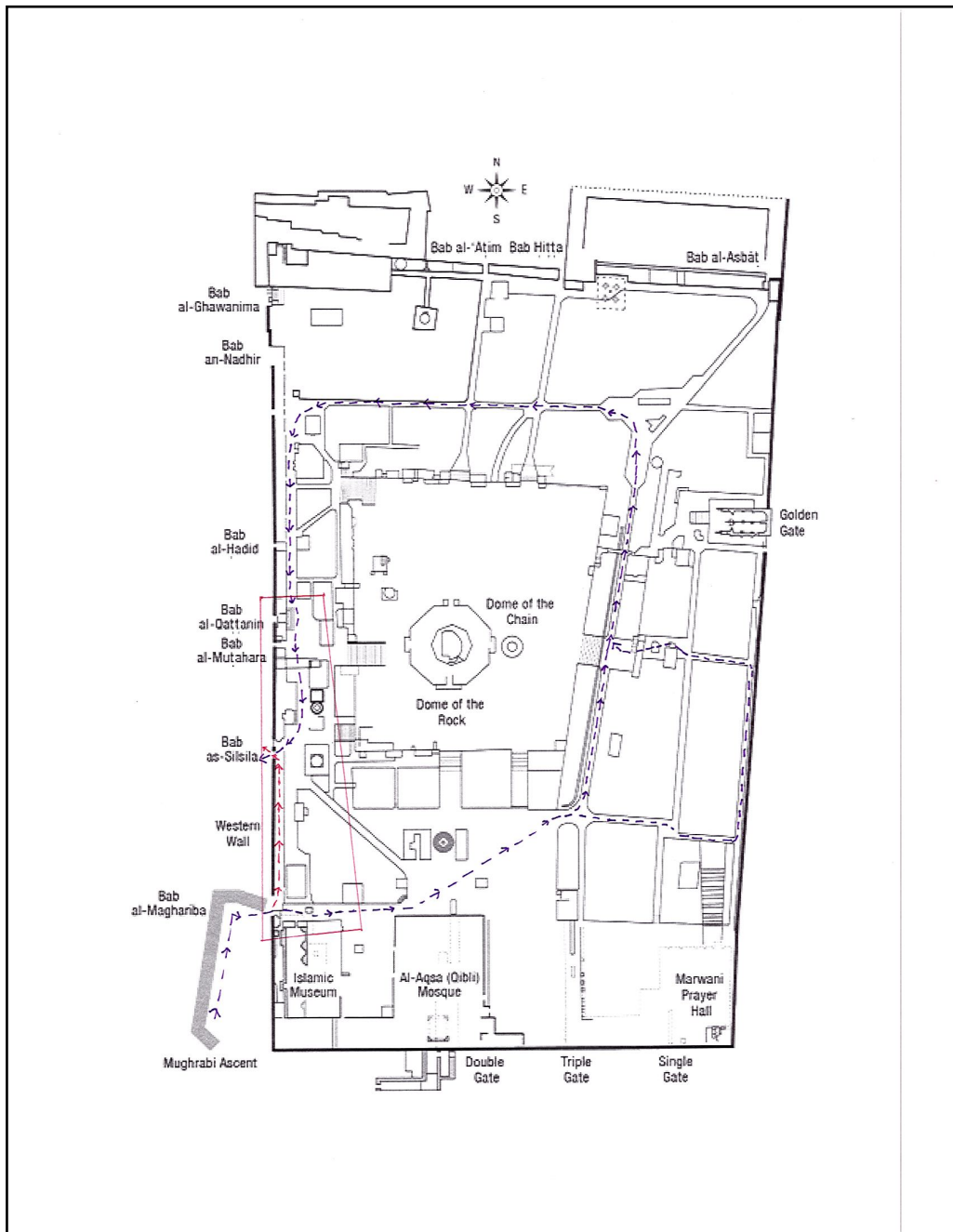
The Choreography of Disruption and Improvisation

Jewish settler groups enter the Haram al-Sharif during visiting hours every day (except Friday and Saturday) and the *Murabitat* shout ‘*Allahu Akbar*’ at them, every day. The two groups, in this way, have a choreography of interaction and confrontation. I use the term choreography deliberately because the ongoing nature of Israeli disruptions and *Murabitat* improvisations have led to a somewhat normalized interaction between the two. Most days, nothing happens beyond this rehearsed choreography. This is an important—and often overlooked—point when the tendency is to focus on violent confrontations.

As noted earlier, the *Murabitat* affirm that non-Muslim visitors to al-Aqsa Mosque are acceptable—even Jews. Individuals and groups affiliated with far-right-wing Jewish organizations that advocate for a change in the Status Quo are the exception, however. They are unwelcome. One might wonder how the *Murabitat* distinguish between Jews entering the compound who have a nefarious intent and those who do not? The answer is straightforward: settlers enter the compound accompanied by Israeli security. Their presence is obvious. One might also wonder why they do not enter inconspicuously. I return to this question shortly.

Upon entering the Haram al-Sharif via the *Bab al-Magharbi*, the settlers follow a more-or-less predetermined path as they leisurely stroll through the compound (See Map 1—dotted purple line). The settlers move east toward the edifice of the *Qibli* Mosque before turning slightly, toward the eastern part of the platform. They then either walk north following the path between the green area and the Dome of the Rock platform, or they continue east until they come to the compound’s

eastern wall and then turn north, eventually making their way to the main path heading north. They pass the Bab al-Rahma on their right and continue north until they turn west, walking north of the Dome of the Rock platform. Upon reaching the Western side of the platform, they turn south and walk to the Bab al-Silsila where they exit. Occasionally, when confrontations occurred, Israeli security compels all visitors (settlers and otherwise) to follow an abbreviated path directly from the *Bab al-Magharbi* to the Bab al-Silsila (See Map 1 – dotted red line)

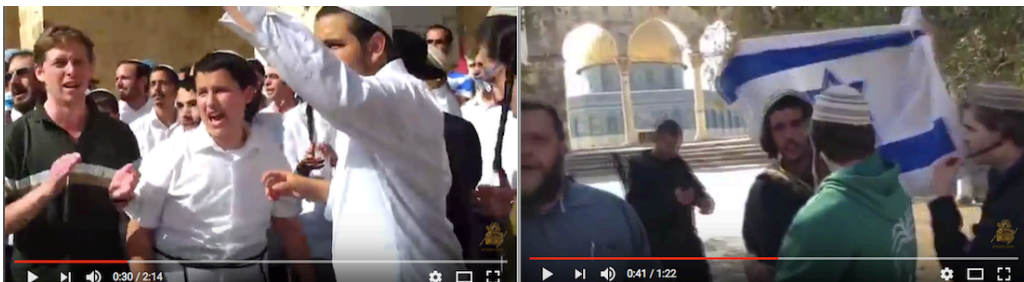


*Map: Physical Layout of Haram al-Sharif with Settlers' walking paths.
Map Source: (International Crisis Group 2015:27).*

Confrontations between the *Murabitat* and the settlers often happen right after the group enters the compound at the *Bab al-Magharbi* or near the Bab al-Silsila before they exit (See Map 1 – solid red box). Skirmishes occasionally happen near Bab al-Rahma at the northwestern corridor of the group’s path. I asked several *Murabitat* to explain in detail what happens when the settlers entered the compound:

We sit and study outside of the Qibli Mosque near the Moroccan gate...The Jews enter from this gate, and they provoke us, saying and doing inappropriate things. Maybe they do it with their face or their hands, making movements that are despicable...They always have seven or eight [security guards] around them. Then the women [*Murabitat*], hear this, they say ‘Allahu Akbar.’ The settlers keep walking, and we stay sitting. We don’t move.⁵⁹⁷

I personally observed similar exchanges, on numerous occasions.⁵⁹⁸ I also noticed that the women used the phrase ‘*Allahu Akbar*’ to alert other Muslims to the settlers’ presence in the compound. To grasp the offensive nature of the settler’s inappropriate activities, I’ve included (below) two screenshots of videos posted by the Temple Institute where Jewish youth are singing, dancing, praying, and raising an Israeli flag on the compound. Each act is offensive to the *Murabitat* and a blatant transgression of the Status Quo. The settlers’ behaviors are like sparks in a gas-soaked tinderbox.



Young Israeli Men singing and dancing on the Haram al-Sharif close to the Bab al-Silsila where the Settler groups exit the compound (Left). Israeli Youth waving an Israeli flag on the Haram al-Sharif (Right). Photo Credit: (The Temple Institute 2013b).

⁵⁹⁷ Interview, January 2016, Old City Jerusalem.

⁵⁹⁸ Multiple videos capturing these offensive behaviors have been posted to Youtube. See, for example: The Temple Institute, "Singing & Dancing on the Temple Mount," *YouTube* (May 28, 2014b), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4xsWhjCq6FY>.

Returning to the previous question: why don't these groups enter inconspicuously without security guards? The answer came to me one morning watching a Jewish youth daven as he approached the Bab al-Silsila gate walking backward. Davening is a form of genuflection Jews perform when praying as they face the Holy of Holies. An Israeli security guard standing close by saw the provocative, inappropriate act and began shoving the youth toward the exit, but the youth persisted. As soon as the soldier pushed the youth beyond the threshold of the compound, the youth pushed the soldier back with great force. This was when I realized that the security guards do not accompany the Jewish settlers merely to protect them from the *Murabitat*, they are there to protect the settlers from themselves and from igniting the gas-soaked tinderbox.

Since shouting '*Allahu Akbar*' in the presence of these Jewish visitors is a prominent feature of the *Murabitat's* activity and discourse, the phrase merits specific analysis. My Interlocutors explained that the phrase could be said by individuals spontaneously or by groups in unison who chant according to the prompting of a leader. The leader calls out '*takbyr*' (which means, say '*Allahu Akbar*') and the group responds, '*Allahu Akbar*.' The expression is firmly rooted in the Islamic tradition, ubiquitous and inextricably connected to Muslim religious sentiments and practices. The Encyclopedia of Islam defines the formula as, "...the briefest expression of the absolute superiority of the One God, it is used in Muslim life in different circumstances, in which the idea of God, His greatness and goodness is suggested."⁵⁹⁹ In this context, the *Murabitat* use the proclamation to express disapproval toward the Israeli extremists' presence and actions on the compound. One *murabita* explained, "It is a call, a declaration that this place is a mosque, not a synagogue."⁶⁰⁰ Others described the phrase as an

⁵⁹⁹ P. Bearman, "Encyclopedia of Islam, Second Edition Online," in *Encyclopedia of Islam*, ed. P. Bearman, et al. (The Netherlands: Brill, 2015).

⁶⁰⁰ Interview February 12, 2016 Old City, East Jerusalem.

inevitable response: “What can we do? We can’t do anything except say ‘*Allahu Akbar*’ because of the oppression we experience.”⁶⁰¹

The *Murabitat* also view the phrase as a weapon. In an exclusive report for the Turkish Arabic news agency, one *Murabita* explained how ‘*Allahu Akbar*’ is a weapon:

*The takbir is the only weapon we possess in al-Aqsa Mosque. They are afraid of the words ‘Allahu Akbar’ in al-Aqsa Mosque because they are entering a place that is not theirs. “Who is more wicked than the men who seek to destroy the mosques of God and forbid his name to be mentioned in them, when it behoves these men to enter them with fear in their hearts?”*⁶⁰² *They enter this place, but [they are] afraid. Because of that, they are unjust to us. It’s not just injustice. It’s more unjust than injustice. They are preventing us from entering our beloved mosque. We’re prevented from entering our Aqsa.*⁶⁰³

‘*Allahu Akbar*’ is a weapon in the sense that it evokes fear and her voice is a weapon of protest. What is more, she supports her assertion with a Qur’anic verse, “And who is more unjust...” In this way, the Qur’an becomes the primary interpretive reference-point for her assertion and explains why Jews enter the mosque with fear. God makes them afraid because God knows they are entering the mosque unjustly. I return to the issue of the *Murabitat*’s expulsion from the mosque shortly.

‘*Allahu Akbar*’ has several salient features as a religious ritual infused with symbolic meaning. The phrase represents and unifies a rich diversity of meanings (the symbolic property of *condensation*). As the above discussion illustrates, ‘*Allahu Akbar*’ is used in a variety of circumstances where suggesting the greatness and goodness of God is appropriate. The declaration also has the symbolic property of *multivocality*. ‘*Allahu Akbar*’ signals that al-Aqsa is a mosque, its used deliberately as a fear-evoking weapon, and the phrase acts as a form of protest to the settlers offensive behavior and unwelcome presence. The *Murabitat* draw from the power of the ritual improvisationally to

⁶⁰¹ Interview February 10, 2016 Old City, East Jerusalem.

⁶⁰² The speaker is quoting from the Qur’an, Al-Baqara 2:114 as found in N. J. Dawood, *The Koran*, Translation (London: Penguin, 1999), 21.

⁶⁰³ Mubashir, "Kalam Mubasir Aydesidava—Murabitat Maqdasiyyat fi al-Masjid al-Aqsa."

communicate each of these elements. The proclamation is an essential element in the ongoing choreography of disruption and improvisation between the *Murabitat* and Israeli settlers on the Haram al-Sharif.

Confrontation, Suppression, and Prohibition

In the fall of 2015, the choreography of disruption and improvisation deteriorated into violent confrontations. Initially, Israel managed the confrontations by protecting the settlers and using extreme methods—tear gas, physical force, and arrests—to disperse the *Murabitat*. Israel ultimately suppressed the confrontations by banning the *Murabitat* from al-Aqsa Mosque completely. In this section, I examine these developments, arguing that the situation deteriorated because Israeli actions became increasingly disruptive while the *Murabitat* continued their improvised religious protest.

As early as 2014, Israel began occasionally delaying or prohibiting the *Murabitat* from entry to the Haram al-Sharif.⁶⁰⁴ As a result, the *Murabitat* started standing at the gates of the Haram al-Sharif in protest, shouting ‘*Allahu Akbar*.’ The Gates of the Haram al-Sharif became new locations for *ribat*. The physical disruption led to a religious improvisation.

⁶⁰⁴ Israel has also suspended some Jewish groups and activists temporarily, though inconsistently. Jeremy Sharon, "Jerusalem Court Upholds Jewish Prayer on Temple Mount," *The Jerusalem Post* (March 3, 2015), <http://www.jpost.com/Israel-News/Jerusalem-court-upholds-Jewish-prayer-on-Temple-Mount-392744>.



*Murabitat being blocked from al-Aqsa Mosque.
Photo credit (al-Safdi 2016).*

While standing outside the gates, the *Murabitat* often saw Jewish groups, exiting the compound. Settler groups would pray and dance just beyond the threshold of the gate. Infuriated, the *Murabitat* would protest, and confrontations would ensue. Israeli security began assaulting, arresting, and physically removing the *Murabitat* from the area. Some were banned from the mosque altogether, without formal charge or expiration-date for their suspension. I witnessed these interactions first-hand numerous times. By the fall of 2015, Israel had forbidden approximately 120 *Murabitat* (the group included 50 women from northern Israel and 70 from East Jerusalem).⁶⁰⁵ One *Murabita* recounted her arrest and Israel's logic for forbidding her entry to the compound:

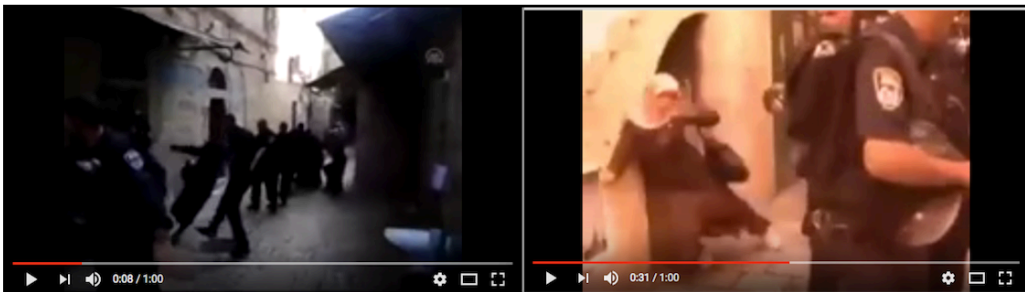
They [Israel] said I was forbidden. What was their accusation? 'You made the settlers afraid.' Did I go to their house and scare them? I'm sitting in my house [the mosque]. I'm sitting in the place that's specified for me. I didn't go to scare them. They are the ones that came and provoked us. I told him 'No, I haven't scared anyone. He said, 'You say 'Allahu Akbar' when the settlers enter the al-Aqsa Mosque.' I told him of course. When I see the police protecting the settlers when they enter the mosque, and the police hitting one of our children because one of the settlers was bothered while the children were playing in al-Aqsa, their house [mosque]. Of course, I want to say 'Allahu Akbar.' I haven't done anything to them. I didn't

⁶⁰⁵ CITpax, "Options for Jerusalem & the Holy Sites."

follow them or hit them. I did what I could. I said 'Allahu Akbar.' They said, 'You are forbidden to do this.' Why? Did I insult you? I said, 'Ya Rabb, Allahu Akbar' because of the oppression that's happening at al-Aqsa.⁶⁰⁶

This *Murabita's* account of her use of 'Allahu Akbar' is similar to others I discussed previously. She uses the term as a form of defense—the only thing she could do given the provocations of the settlers, their invasion of her sacred space, and the soldier's violent treatment of a child. She is also keenly aware of the accusation that her use of 'Allahu Akbar' evokes fear in the settlers. She does not regret this, however, but explains that the settlers' fear is evidence they were behaving inappropriately, not her. She feels oppressed and violated. She also conveys the sacredness of the mosque in domestic and intimate terms ('I'm sitting in my house') I have already discussed.

Most of the *Murabitas* I interviewed reported being insulted and hit by Israeli soldiers. They told (or showed) me broken arms, twisted ankles, and deep bruises. One spoke of getting a concussion. Others related the horror of having their hijab's ripped off—an egregious transgression of their bodies and honor.



*Israeli soldier intentionally tripping a Murabita, (Left).
Israeli soldier shoving Murabita into a cement wall (Right).
Photo Credit (Muslim AP 2014).*

I asked Amina in one interview if these flagrant transgressions of her body made her afraid. She responded,

No. It does not make us afraid. Why? Because we struggle for our belief. We've done nothing wrong with our lives. It's them who have done something to us. We do not fear... We get upset sometimes, but we do not fear. We know they are our enemies, religious

⁶⁰⁶ Alyateema AlqsaLion, "In Sitters Outside Alaqsa I Murabitat Kharij al-Aqsa," *YouTube* (December 21, 2012), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lovdXVY2Yvg>.

*enemies, enemies of God even. Believe me—they are even enemies of themselves.*⁶⁰⁷

Israel's violations did not make Amina afraid; they furthered her resolve. Most of the women had similar responses. While they confessed to getting upset, they remained fully convinced that their actions were appropriate and justified. Many spoke of Israel's transgressions as only deepening their commitment to the Mosque. They became more emphatic and resolved to defend the mosque at any cost.⁶⁰⁸

Tension in Jerusalem increased in the fall of 2015 in anticipation of the coming Jewish holidays. Rosh Hashana (the Jewish New Year) was going to be September 14-15, Yom Kippur September 23, and Sukkot September 28-29. The Muslim holiday, Eid al-Adha, was going to happen one day after Yom Kippur. Since each holiday draws vast numbers of people to Jerusalem's Old city—both Jews and Muslims⁶⁰⁹—the numbers of Jews who ascend the Temple Mount/Haram al-Sharif increases, too. Israeli Media smeared *Ribat* as a form of incitement initiated by the Northern Branch of the Islamic movement which, they argued, had financial and ideological ties to terrorist organizations such as Hamas and Al-Qaeda.⁶¹⁰ Israel outlawed the Islamic Movement of Israel and its affiliate *Murabitin* and *Murabitat* organizations, arguing that they were intimidating Jewish visitors at the Temple Mount by shouting '*Allahu Akbar.*'⁶¹¹

⁶⁰⁷ Personal interview, February 10, 2016 Old City Jerusalem.

⁶⁰⁸ Personal Interview, East Jerusalem February 10, 2016. See also, Mubashir, "Kelam Mubasir Aydesidava—Murabitat Maqdasiiyyat fi al-Masjid al-Aqsa." Min.20 Sec. 3; 'Ayn al-'Alim, "'Ayn al-'Alim—Latiyfa 'Abd al-Latiyf Murabita Maqdasiiyya Muba'da," *YouTube* (February 6, 2015), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qvFIVMz3RiM>.

⁶⁰⁹ Dumper, *Jerusalem Unbound: Geography, History, and the Future of the Holy City*, 2014.

⁶¹⁰ Eldar, "Who Are the Temple Mount's Mourabitoun?"; Cohen, "Israel Bans Two Muslim Activist Groups from Temple Mount."

⁶¹¹ Ruth Eglash, "Israel Outlaws Muslim Civilian Guards at Jerusalem's Al-Aqsa Mosque," *The Washington Post* (September 10, 2015), https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/israel-outlaws-muslim-civilian-guards-at-jerusalem-al-aqsa-mosque/2015/09/10/0d2c4b52-565f-11e5-9f54-1ea23f6e02f3_story.html.; Jonathan Cook, "Behind the Ban on the Islamic Movement in Israel." *Middle East Research and Information Project (MERIP)* (January 11, 2016), <https://www.merip.org/mero/mero0111116>.

After the disruptive prohibition, the *Murabitat* improvised another location to gather. The met just beyond the *Bab Hitta* gate on the Via Dolorosa north of the Haram al-Sharif, a publicly conspicuous location conducive to assembly (pictured below). At Bab Hitta, the *Murabitat* continued to practice learning circles—praying, taking lessons, and reciting sacred texts—as they chanted ‘*Allahu Akbar*’ at threatening Jewish groups when they walked by. The group’s spatial displacement from the Mosque and its gates, however, significantly curtailed the group’s visibility and effectiveness. They received less public attention, and their engagements with settler groups were perceived as being less provocative. The Israeli State, therefore, ignored them for several months.



*Murabitat sitting in the Bab Hitta public sitting space.
Personal photo, February 10, 2016*

As a researcher, however, this window of time was very productive. I was able to interact with the women at Bab Hitta freely and inconspicuously. For hours at a time, I had the informal and unscripted interactions with the women. Then, in April 2016, Israel forbid the *Murabitat* from assembling at Bab Hitta, accusing them of harassing tourists and disturbing the peace.

In this section, I have described the disruptions and improvisations occurring between the *Murabitat* and the Israeli State. While the disruptions partially defused the symbolic power of the rituals through physical displacement, Israel did not anticipate how its egregious transgression of women's bodies and their sacred honor would infuriate all Palestinians. And these transgressions would lead to the assimilation of *ribat* discourse into the broader Palestinian society. To that issue, I now turn.

***Murabitat* Improvisations Change the Performance**

Israeli violations and prohibitions of the *Murabitat* dramatically raised public awareness of the *Murabitat* among Palestinians. They were infuriated by the indecent and violent treatment of the women. Israeli transgressions were so repulsive that they led to transformations in the Palestinian community. The combination of disruptions and improvisations resonated so deeply among Palestinians they created a shift in the way Palestinians understood and articulated their resistance to Israel. Palestinians began to claim that "We are all *Murabitin*." The resonance was linked both to the centrality of *ribat* language within the discursive tradition of Islam (as discussed above) and the perceived affinity and common cause between the *Murabitat* at al-Aqsa Mosque and the rest of the population. The rituals of the *Murabitat*, thus, had the third improvisational effect—they changed the course of the performance.

How, exactly, did the transformation occur and what were their implications for Palestinian society? One Jerusalemite's comment sums up several dominant themes:

*Jerusalemites don't see it [Murabitat] as an organization. Everyone is one. It's not just a religious category; it became a tool to defend—a religious and political defense mechanism. Palestinians also see it within the context of peaceful resistance of occupation. This is why it fell into place so quickly. This is indicative of a larger trend; women were seen as less threatening. But when these women were attacked, it was so repulsive.*⁶¹²

⁶¹² CITpax, "Options for Jerusalem & the Holy Sites."

First, Palestinians saw the *Murabitin* and the *Murabitat* as an informal network that made resisting Israeli aggressions on the Haram al-Sharif their primary cause. It was not an organization. My ethnographic observations affirmed this view. As I sat with the women and listened to their interactions, it was clear that their activities were organized informally and mediated through pre-existing relationships. In most cases, participants had known one another for many years. Their attachment to Jerusalem and shared grievances against Israel were more profound than a mere organizational structure. Saying ‘*Allahu Akbar*’ in the face of Israeli settlers, for example, was only one, modest expression of their lifelong and indigenous commitment to the city and Mosque. Being *Murabitat* had little—if nothing—to do with formal institutions. It was a deeply assimilated principle which originated in their fundamental faith convictions, their social networks, and indigenous attachments to the city.

My interlocutors did acknowledge that the Islamic Movement of Israel had been involved, but they often explained that Israeli portrayals of the Movement’s role were exaggerated and misleading. They explained that Israeli accounts completely neglected the aggressive and inappropriate behavior of the Jewish settlers. They also saw Israel’s institutionalization of the group as a tactical means of suppression. Scholars of social movements have observed similar strategies in other contexts.⁶¹³ Governments suppress movements by institutionalizing them—they become easier targets if they can be made to operate in the same realm as state institutions. Israel exaggerated the institutional dimension of the *Murabitin* and the *Murabitat* by claiming that *ribat* was a form of incitement initiated and funded by terrorist organizations associated with the Northern Branch of the Islamic Movement. They averred that the *Murabitat* were receiving up to 4,000 ILS a month to participate in *ribat* activities. If the *Murabitat* could be associated financially with illegal terrorist institutions, their prohibition could be justified. Such logic, however, overlooks one fact the *Murabitat* regularly pointed out to me: If someone receives money for worship, the worship

⁶¹³ Quintan Wiktorowicz, ed. *Islamic Activism: A Social Movement Theory Approach* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2004), Chapter 1.

becomes mercenary and, therefore, invalid—God would not accept such insincere expressions of faith. For the *Murabitat* to understand their cause in religious terms in one area—and not another—would be hypocritical. Authentically practicing their faith required both sincerity and integrity.

Another dimension of the organizational debate is the futility of placing exclusive blame on the Islamic Movement of Israel. While movements use various discursive tactics to frame their grievances, they also actively seek mechanisms and themes that have resonance among their constituents. The relationship between the Islamic Movement and its constituents, in other words, is mutually constitutive. Placing blame solely at the hands of the Islamic Movement is to neglect the agentive capacity of the individuals who comprise the movement. Movement leaders and constituents improvise together. Since the Islamic Movement deliberately framed its grievances and activism as inspired by Islam, utilizing a term with strong religious connotations made sense strategically. The Islamic Movement, however, never had—and never will have—a monopoly on religious language. The concept of *ribat* had too broad of resonance to be confined to one particular Islamic institutional expression. The concept resonated with Palestinians because of its location within the broader Islamic tradition, not because the Islamic Movement used it. Hence, the argument at the beginning of the section: *ribat* gained traction among Palestinians because of the perceived affinity and common cause between those who physically stood guard at al-Aqsa Mosque and the rest of the population. This explains why I heard numerous people explain, “We are all *Murabitin*.” Every Muslim can be a *Murabit* because all Muslims participate in the collective struggle against Zionism and Israeli settler colonialism.

Second, with an eye on the previous quote (“*It’s not just a religious category; it became a tool to defend—a religious and political defense mechanism. Palestinians also see it within the context of peaceful resistance of occupation*”), we see the next reason for the concept’s quick adoption: *ribat* is a non-violent form of resistance.

Palestinians have debated the use of violent and non-violent means of achieving their national aspirations extensively (See Chapter 4). What forms of resistance are religiously defensible, ethically justifiable, and politically efficacious? Muhammad, a Sheikh employed by the Palestinian *Waqf*, explained the ethical sensibilities of the *Murabitat* by contrasting them with suicide bombers:

If someone wears an explosive belt on their chest and goes down to blow themselves up, this is refused in religion. In principle, if you're supposed to protect your life, you can't die like this. Religion compels you to defend al-Aqsa, but you can't blow up yourself... but other means are permitted. Religion will tell you to go sit at al-Aqsa and die. It's no problem because they [soldiers] are the ones assaulting you. It's no problem... Religion tells you that it's forbidden to turn your back. Don't blow up yourself—just stay standing. If he kills you [while in this position], it's no problem... If you understand [your religion correctly], you will know that you are supposed to remain standing. If you don't know, maybe you will get an explosive belt and explode yourself.⁶¹⁴

Here, Muhammad is showing that *ribat* is an ethically and morally defensible by contrasting it with the indefensible action of suicide bombing. While shouting 'Allahu Akbar' in the face of the Jewish extremists can be provocative emotionally or psychologically, the *Murabitat* emphasized that the settlers were in no physical danger. The *Murabitat* saw no incongruence between Islam as a religion of peace and 'Allahu Akbar' as a non-violent means of resistance. In fact, the perceived congruence between the two was one of the authenticating mechanisms for their activity. Since Islam is a religion of peace and 'Allahu Akbar' causes no physical harm, it is a valid and authentic expression of faith. The perceived peaceful resistance of the *Murabitat* is a central component explaining why the notion gained traction in Palestinian society so quickly.

Third, *ribat* is "...a religious and political defense mechanism." To convey the point by analogy: *ribat* is a present, and Islam is the box the present comes wrapped in. The substance of *ribat* (the present) is defense, not Islam itself. *Ribat* is the discursive mechanism—the discursive improvisation—which articulates the *Murabitat's* efforts to

⁶¹⁴ Personal Interview, Al-Ram, East Jerusalem, June 2014.

defend the mosque from Israeli aggression. The analogy also explains why non-religious Jerusalemites would readily adopt the term: it is about the defense of the Haram al-Sharif which Israel was disrupting. *Ribat* is a framing mechanism for the broader defensive struggle against the occupation and Israel's settler-colonialism. Palestinians are defending the mosque against Jewish extremists who seek to change the Status Quo on the site. Khadija, a friend from the Old City, put it this way:

*The situation is very saddening because of what Israel is doing. They are dragging all the area—all of Jerusalem and all of Palestine—into a religious war. It is because they are getting closer to al-Aqsa. If no one were getting closer to al-Aqsa, there would be no problem.*⁶¹⁵

Khadija sees the *Murabitat's* protection of al-Aqsa as a reaction to the greater emphasis on the Temple Mount within Israeli society. The *Murabitat* are merely defending the mosque from Israeli encroachment. *Ribat* is a defensive mechanism responding to Israeli disruptions of routine Muslim worship at the site.

Khadija's point underscores another important dynamic: since the conflict between the *Murabitat* and Jewish extremists is taking place on and around sacred space, the use of religious language to frame their engagement seems almost inevitable. This explains why, in part, the emphasis in Palestinian language has shifted from *sumud* to *ribat*. As I discussed in Chapter 4, the concept of *sumud* with its diverse and diffuse connotations is too broad to adequately express the focused and particular need for defense of the sacred space. *Ribat* has given a linguistic frame to express the symbolic attachment Palestinian Muslims feel to the sacred space, regardless of their physical location.

We have now arrived at the final—and most important—reason *ribat* language had such resonance within Palestinian society: Israel's violent treatment of the women. When Israel began attacking the women, Palestinians pulled out their cell phones, recorded the events,

⁶¹⁵ Interview, Qafr Aqab, Jerusalem September 13, 2015.

and posted them on social media.⁶¹⁶ Most people heard about the offensive attacks through Facebook and other Social Media sites. Women were seen being hit, kicked, pushed, and head-locked; the most ire-evoking were videos of Israeli soldiers ripping off the veils (*hijabs*) of the *Murabitat*. Palestinians viewed Israel's actions as flagrant abuses of women's sacred honor and were appropriately enraged. As the previous quote explained: "*But when these women were attacked, it was so repulsive.*" Israeli transgressions and the *Murabitat's* heroism combined to spark the vernacular transformation within Palestinian society. Hence, the quote at the beginning of the chapter, "[The] *Murabitat* are pioneers and heroes—the new virgins of the Palestinian resistance."⁶¹⁷

Women have played an active role in the Palestinian struggle historically.⁶¹⁸ While they were engaged in the seminal period of the national project, their involvement was challenged, transformed, and diminished with the ascendancy of Islamic movements. Islamists have asserted that the inclusion of women is a form of collusion with western liberal democratic forces which seek to undermine society from within.⁶¹⁹ Yet the Islamic framing was unable to prevent women from playing an active role: they recast their involvement through Islamic frameworks.⁶²⁰ Looking toward the future in Palestinian society, Sophie Richter-Devroe speculated that "Female resistance activism can

⁶¹⁶ Here are three examples: Fekra Mall, "Niza' al-Hijab wa al-'l'tida' bi-al-Darab 'ala al-Maqdasiyya 'Aber Ziyad 2," *YouTube* (October 9, 2014), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hTHnzR2Ddvk>.; IslamOnline, "Darab al-Nisa' wa Niza' al-Hijab 'an al-Ikhawat fi al-Masjid al-Aqsa al-Mubarak Ba'd Mani'him Min al-Dukhu!!!" *YouTube* (July 8, 2014), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yiYYaLRkizM>.; AlJazeera Mubasher, "Shuhud: Junud al-Ihtilal Hawalu Niza' Hijab Fataa fi al-Masjid al-Aqsa," *YouTube* (April 8, 2015), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zBzMkc5HJAw>.

⁶¹⁷ CITpax, "Options for Jerusalem & the Holy Sites."

⁶¹⁸ Jean-Klein, "Mothercraft, Statecraft, and Subjectivity in the Palestinian Intifada"; Rhoda Ann Knaaneh, *Birth of the Nation: Strategies of Palestinian Women in Israel* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2002); Peteet, *Gender in Crisis: Women and the Palestinian Resistance Movement*.

⁶¹⁹ F. Allabadi, "Controversy: Secular and Islamist Women in Palestinian Society," *European Journal of Women's Studies* 15, no. 3 (2008); Hammami, "Women, the Hijab and the Intifada"; Rema Hammami and Penny Johnson, "Equality with a Difference: Gender and Citizenship in Transitional Palestine," *Social Politics* 6, no. 3 (1999).

⁶²⁰ Hammami, "Women, the Hijab and the Intifada."

potentially affect social (/gender) and political change.” She speculates that:

A better understanding of women’s practical and discursive strategies of courageous action-oriented, yet largely non-violent, dissident activism thus ultimately might provide visionary outlines of a non-masculinist, non-militarist, yet proactive political culture in Palestine.⁶²¹

Richter-Devroe’s analysis was published in 2012, shortly before the *Murabitat* gained notoriety. Today, the *Murabitat* are a fulfillment of what Richter-Devroe imagined—a visionary, non-masculine, nonviolent, dissident women’s group, transforming what it means for women to be religiously and politically active in Palestine. To unpack this transformation and link it to the improvisation thesis, I examine how the *Murabitat* view themselves and their activism.

Murabita Latifa Abdel-Latifa’s explains the challenges she faced and how they clashed with the traditional Islamic patriarchal society:

*Aside from the occupation forces, don’t forget that we are a conservative society, a male-dominated society. In the beginning when they [Israeli forces] removed us, and we decided to sit at the gates, sometimes people would come and say, ‘You are women. Go be in your houses. What are you doing here?’ Sometimes when we would say ‘Allahu Akbar’ people would say, ‘Your voice is ‘aura [a pudendum]. Don’t speak. Be quiet.’ We had these experiences.*⁶²²

Abdel-Latifa and her fellow *Murabitat* challenged established gender norms in Palestine. Loren Lybarger explains Palestinian gender dynamics, thus; “The fighter and militant peasant represented the virulent ‘outside’; the woman, the passive and steadfast ‘inside’ awaiting liberation. Such symbols tapped into patriarchal notions of honor and the necessity to redeem it when it became violated.”⁶²³ Saying that Abdel-Latifa’s rightful place was in the house and that her voice was ‘aura were clear expressions of a male-dominated, patriarchal Palestinian society. The term ‘aura is best-translated *pudendum* (pl. *pudenda*) and is the external parts of the female body that must be

⁶²¹ Sophie Richter-Devroe, "Defending Their Land, Protecting Their Men," *International Feminist Journal of Politics* 14, no. 2 (2012): 182.

⁶²² al-'Alim, "'Ayn al-'Alim—Latiyfa 'Abd al-Latiyf Murabita Maqdasiyya Muba'da."

⁶²³ Lybarger, *Identity and Religion in Palestine: The Struggle between Islamism and Secularism in the Occupied Territories*, 24.

covered. For her Palestinian critics to call her voice a pudendum was to convey that it had the potential to cause embarrassment and was something to be ashamed of.⁶²⁴ In this way, the *Murabitat* challenged the 'outside' vs. 'inside' structuring of gender roles typical of Palestinian patriarchal society. Not all Palestinian responses were negative, however. Abdel-Latifa continues:

*But on the other hand, we had people support and appreciate. People would say, 'You have lifted our heads.' In every society, as a woman, there are difficulties with the family from their fear and anxiety. "You're a girl. We're afraid for you to be seized or arrested." These thoughts are normal. But, on the other hand, they [your family] will support you in your decision because they know that this is the right thing.*⁶²⁵

I heard this tension described often: women's families were concerned with their safety and well-being, but not to the extent that they prevented their activities. The improvisational activism of the *Murabitat* created space for an innovative dialogue about gender dynamics within Palestinian society. The *Murabitat* were admired for their courage, defending the Mosque at any cost, even the transgression of their bodies. Two *Murabita* elaborate on gender dynamics and bodily transgressions:

Mariam—They [the men] are with us. But the Jews they have no mercy, they press tightly on them. I can do something, and they will arrest me for a couple of days. But with the guys, there is no mercy. Because of this, we face them [the Jews].

Amina—When they closed al-Aqsa for the men, what did we women have to do? We had to fill al-Aqsa. Then because of this, the men began to fear for the women a bit. It stopped being a masculine society. It became an equal society. The women are now like the

⁶²⁴ Saba Mahmood explains that "The term 'aura, used to describe women here, is complex and has a variety of meanings, including "weakness," "faultiness," "unseemliness," "imperfection," "disfigurement," "and "genitalia." ... The English term pudendum best captures the meaning of 'aura used in this Hadith because it refers not only to the genital organs of men and women, but also to that "of which one ought to be ashamed (OED 1999)... According to this view, all those parts of a woman's body that may cause embarrassment and shame should therefore be covered, which, in the majority view of Muslim jurists, includes everything except a woman's hands, feet, and face." Mahmood, *Politics of Piety: The Islamic Revival and the Feminist Subject*, 106-07.

⁶²⁵ al-'Alim, "'Ayn al-'Alim—Latiyfa 'Abd al-Latiyf Murabita Maqdasiyya Muba'da."

*men. Women must exert themselves. It's considered jihad. We exert [jihad] ourselves to protect al-Aqsa.*⁶²⁶

Mariam and Amina's comments are critical for understanding why the *Murabitat* had such resonance. First, Israel has historically treated Men more harshly than women in its violent and suppressive tactics against Palestinians. Men have been wounded, maimed, and incarcerated for even slight infractions. And these violations have caused immense strain on them personally, vocationally, socially, culturally and politically. But the women, as Mariam explains, understand that the soldiers were more likely to treat them less severely. They may be arrested and jailed for a couple days. And in this sense, the women's resistance was preferable because it provoked less long-term and consequential disruptions. Israel treated the women with less severity. Second, Amina's comment casts light on another critical element contributing to the *Murabitat's* influence and resonance. Protecting al-Aqsa Mosque is paramount for Palestinian Muslims. When Israel began preventing men from entering the mosque (whether for prayer or protecting it from Israeli disruptions), women felt compelled to fill the void. They were responsible for guarding the mosque, too. This also explains why the men were supportive of the women's involvement. Although they had been made incapable of protecting the mosque themselves, the men remained resolved to protect the mosque at any cost. Then, when the women were forbidden and transgressed upon by Israeli soldiers, men protested. Their women's honor was violated and, culturally, men were compelled to respond. This, too, contributed to the *Murabitat's* resonance.

Amina, in the above quote, also strikingly claims that Palestinian society now has gender equality. She perceives that the *Murabitat* have forged a new path—that her society no longer has a masculine bias. In my surprise at this bold assertion, I asked her and Mariam to elaborate:

Mariam—In every society there are people who understand and people who don't... We have extremists (mutashaddidin) for a masculine society. We have others that are not. There are equality

⁶²⁶ Interview, Old City Jerusalem, February 10, 2016.

and reciprocal rights. A man is like a woman regarding their rights. It's not because the man controls the woman....

Amina—[Interrupting]—About the issue of a male-dominated society, women, and equality, I want to say one-third of our men and children are either in prison, are martyrs or have left because of what they [the Jews] are doing among us. You will not find a house that doesn't have a prisoner or a martyr. Because of this, who is going to defend the country and al-Aqsa?—Women. We have put ourselves in this position because the men are either in prison or martyrs.... It was forced upon us that we go out and speak the truth and not deny it.

Mariam and Amina acknowledge dissenting opinions within Palestinian society, but these voices have not kept them from filling the void caused by Israel's suppression of the men. Women have had no choice but to act since the men have been arrested, imprisoned, and killed. By repressing the men, Israel has inadvertently created an affordance for gender equality. In the absence of men, the women have been compelled to improvise.

While I question the assimilation of the *Murabitat's* views on gender-equality throughout Palestinian society; these ideas were indicative of their sense of personal empowerment and agency nevertheless. Richter-Devroe's prediction in 2012 was correct: the *Murabitat* have become a visionary, non-masculine, nonviolent, dissident women's group, transforming what it means for women to be religiously and politically active in Palestine. But the question remains: How long will their performance-changing improvisation resonate?

Conclusion: "We are all *Murabitin*" — For Now

Ribat is a discursive mechanism—the discursive improvisation which articulated Palestinian defense against Israeli aggression at the Haram al-Sharif. But the influence of the *Murabitat* has not been limited to the Haram al-Sharif. Nels Johnson, at the conclusion of *Islam and the Politics of Meaning in Palestinian Nationalism*, argues that:

Social movements are everywhere concerned with the maintenance or reformulation of group boundaries; who we are, who they are, where are we going, from where have we come, and so forth. A successful ideology...is one that articulates these concerns in a way which appeals to a wide audience. Islam has

highly condensed and complex ideation concerned with group boundaries: [in Palestine] concepts such as *hijrah*, *jihad*, *ummah*, *kufr*, *dar al-Islam*, *dar al-harb* and *dar-al-sulh*, among others, focus on the questions of Muslim identity, opposition, and change.⁶²⁷

The *Murabitat* have added *ribat* to this list of Islamic concepts in Palestine. They are a social movement that has sparked a large-scale discursive shift in the way Palestinians articulate their position, presence, and resistance to Israel's occupation and settler-colonialism in Jerusalem through a specifically Islamic frame. Khadija, whom I introduced earlier, sums it up this way: "Those who go and stay in al-Aqsa, they are the true *Murabitin*. But, now, we are all *Murabitin*."⁶²⁸ My ethnographic fieldwork corroborates the point. Throughout my fieldwork, I was within earshot of mosques in various Palestinian cities throughout the West Bank during Friday prayers and often heard the phrase over the loudspeaker: "*Oh Muslims, Oh Murabitun*". One interlocutor even explained that every Muslim who crosses the threshold of the Haram al-Sharif prays: "Oh God, I have intended *ribat*."⁶²⁹ While his claim is likely untrue quantitatively, it is significant qualitatively: he perceives that all Palestinian Muslims understand and use *ribat* language ubiquitously. But will this way of understanding and practicing *ribat* remain?

After leaving Jerusalem, I continued to find evidence for the increased use of *ribat* language, much of it aligning with the previous exposition. But I also began to notice that people's use of the concept began to shift. Two examples illustrate: First, Misbah Abu Sbeih, the Jerusalemite who killed two Israelis by a car-ramming in East Jerusalem on October 10, 2016, was described by Palestinian media in two honorific ways, he was called "The Lion of al-Aqsa," and a "*Murabit*."⁶³⁰

⁶²⁷ Johnson, *Islam and the Politics of Meaning in Palestinian Nationalism*, 103.

⁶²⁸ Interview, Qafir 'Aqab, January 2014.

⁶²⁹ *allahuma inni nawayt al-ribat*. Personal Interview, Al-Ram, East Jerusalem, January 2015.

⁶³⁰ Zena Tahhan, "Misbah Abu Sbeih 'Reached Breaking Point', Says Family," *Aljazeera* (October 11, 2016), <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/2016/10/misbah-abu-sbeih-reached-breaking-point-family-161011102251854.html>.; The Palestinian Information Center, "Man Huwa al-Shaheed Misbah Abu Sbeh (Asad al-Aqsa) Munafith 'Amaliyya al-Quds?'" *The Palestinian Information Center* (October 9, 2016), <https://www.palinfo.com/188835>.

Israeli forces had arrested him multiple times the week before the attack. Their charge against him was “*Ribat* in al-Aqsa,” and he was given a four-month prison sentence. He was on his way to hand himself over to serve the sentence when he impulsively rammed his car into pedestrians on Ammunition Hill. I found no evidence that Misbah had been among the *Murabitin* who literally stood guard at al-Aqsa. Misbah’s *ribat* was something different—he was regarded as a *Murabit* because of his love for al-Aqsa and his willingness to confront the occupation head on. And because of his car ramming, *ribat* was associated with violence—not only by Israeli sources, but in Palestinian ones, too. This instance poses a challenge to the men and women we met in this chapter who frame their activities as explicitly nonviolent. Second, I discovered a group called “The Body of *Murabitin* in Jerusalem,” lead by Yusuf Mukhaymar.⁶³¹ The group publishes monthly updates on political developments in Jerusalem and raises public awareness about Israeli violations against Palestinians and Jerusalemite. They have gathered over 49,000 Facebook followers.⁶³² Their activities do not include physically confronting Jewish settlers on the Haram al-Sharif like the women I have examined in this chapter. *Ribat*, here, has become a catch-all term for the group’s political activism.

These two examples illustrate the dynamic and ongoing flexibility of *ribat* language, why *ribat* is best understood improvisationally. Neither instance has anything to do with the particular practices or discourses of the *Murabitat* examined throughout the chapter. People have latched onto the term’s resonance to express alternative visions of struggle against the occupation. As Jerusalemites continue to live with the conflict, the vocabulary they use will evolve with their struggle. Israeli disruptions will continue to trigger discursive and ritual improvisations.

⁶³¹ Hay’at al-Murabitin fi al-Quds, “Hay’at al-Murabitin fi al-Quds,” *Facebook* (October 17, 2017), www.facebook.com/muquds/.

⁶³² The figure 49,000 was obtained on October 2, 2017. *Ibid.*

The starkest illustration of the improvisational nature of the *ribat* discourse, however, came while I was still in the field. In the period when the *Murabitat* were permitted to gather at Bab Hitta, and I sat with them informally, several women explained that they no longer considered themselves *Murabitat*:

The word Murabita is forbidden. I was arrested, and they said, "You are a Murabita." I'm not a Murabita. The word Murabita is forbidden. You go to prison. I say this to explain things to you... Every person who enters al-Aqsa, they don't have to be a 'murabit.' Ribat, for us in Islam, is that someone goes to al-Aqsa, or any mosque, and prays, stays to attend a lesson, reads the Qur'an, stays waiting for the next prayer. This is ribat. This is as the prophet has said it. This is the meaning. But they [Jews] consider that Murabitat means problems. Because of this, there are arrests... An investigator asked me are you a Murabita? I told him not, I'm not a Murabita. Then [he asked] "what do you call yourselves now, Jihadis or something?" We are not Jihadis. We are peaceful people. We have never thrown a stone in our lives. We only say 'Allahu Akbar.' We don't do anything else.⁶³³

Mariam's dismissal of the term was unrelated to her core convictions about the sacredness of al-Aqsa, Israel's aggressions on it, or her deep-felt responsibility to defend it. Her dismissal was solely about Israel's prohibition of the term. If Israel made it illegal to be a '*Murabita*,' then the language is no longer useful to her. Returning to the present-and-wrapping analogy: Mariam views *Murabit* as a wrapping for her commitment to defend the mosque. *Ribat* is not something Israel can alter or corrupt by claiming that it is illegal. The term is less important to Mariam than the divinely sanctioned principle given by God through the Prophet Muhammad. The example illustrates the improvisational nature of the *Murabitat*'s discourse. The language is adaptable but not the core-conviction behind it. Mariam's dismissal of the term *jihadi* is also interesting. Miriam wanted nothing to do with it. In other interviews, however, I encountered women who explained that *ribat* was a form of non-violent *jihad*, a peaceful struggle done in the name of their religion. But Mariam, like several other women, were uncomfortable with the term. Their reluctance was related to other people's perception of the term, not what they understood it to mean. She did not want her

⁶³³ Interview, East Jerusalem, February 2016.

protection of the Mosque to be delegitimized by an oft-misunderstood label. This, too, illustrates the improvisational nature of their activism. They were looking for language that both articulated their grievance against Israel and could not be misconstrued as violent. These women were improvising with language.

In conclusion, the *Murabitat* have used the symbolic power of sacred space to improvise innovative religious practices and discourses to redefine how Palestinian Muslims understand and articulate their resistance to Israeli settler-colonial practices in Jerusalem and beyond. Their improvisations have changed the entire course of the conflict by causing a society-wide linguistic shift. But it is important to note that the shifts remain dynamic and ongoing. Israel may prohibit specific individuals and organizations from the Haram al-Sharif or disrupt religious practices in various ways, but they will never be to control how Palestinians understand and articulate their faith. So long as the conflict continues, the disruption-improvisation dynamic will persist.

Chapter 8

Conclusion: The Jazz of Religious Practice

Jazz is Listening

After a jazz musician plays a note, melody, or phrase, the improvisation will have one of three effects. And these effects—the discordant, resonant, or performance-changing—are how I have framed the content of the three previous chapters. But the improvisation-effect observation begs the question: what next?

I entered university as an undergraduate student with a piano performance scholarship. I was invited for my skills playing Beethoven, Mozart, and Rachmaninoff. But when I heard an upperclassman improvise a piano solo to the tune *On Green Dolphin Street* with the jazz combo, my musical trajectory changed course. I began studying to become a jazz pianist.⁶³⁴ I relay this anecdote not to wax nostalgic about my past, but to convey a valuable—and relevant—lesson from my training. During rehearsals, the jazz-band conductor interjected as we played—“Listen! Are you listening? Listen!” I heard this refrain for four years and I learned that jazz improvisation had as much to do with listening as playing. As jazz musicians listen, they typically have two things in mind: What did I just hear? And where might this be going? In this chapter, I attempt to enter that listening-space, briefly summarizing the arguments I have made and offering several speculations about where the material might be going.

In Chapter 1, I set out the study’s driving contention and question, frame and objective. I argued that rituals have an implicit routine and rhythm and that disruptions are problematic because they interfere with the ritual’s natural performance. Disruptions were further problematic since faith, as a phenomenon, takes shape in people’s lives through ritual activity. I observed that there were implicit links between faith as a cognitive category and rituals as the bodily outworking of those beliefs. I pointed out that Muslim religious rituals in Jerusalem are regularly

⁶³⁴ And I am painfully out of practice these days.

disrupted and rarely routine. I noticed an unexamined assumption about rituals—that people who intend to perform them can routinely act on their intentions. I argued that on the flip-side of disruptions, there were opportunities for creative improvisations. I explained how improvisations were not haphazard or thoughtless as initial impression may seem. Improvisations were, instead, the product of a practiced and deliberate way of engaging in ritual activity in a disrupted environment. They were like the improvisations of jazz musicians. In Jerusalem, disruptions created an opportunity for Muslims to adapt their rituals discursively and physically, altering the meanings they attributed to them. In Chapter 2, I explained the methods I used to conduct the study. There is little need to repeat that material, except to say that my research was ethnographic and occurred over a 5-year period (2011-2016).

In Chapter 3, I unpacked my theoretical positions on ritual and where I located myself within the Anthropology of Islam. I explained how my orientation was derived from the neo-pragmatist position—that people are implicitly creative, and that the means and ends of social action developed coterminously. I also set my understanding of ritual within a broader conversation about tradition, culling insights from Hobsbawm and Ranger's book, *The Invention of Tradition* and Eickelman and Piscatori's *Muslim Politics*. I will not rehash their arguments here, but highlight one insight—that in vulnerable and threatened societies, rituals and traditions are likely to evolve. I picked up Rabinowitz and Furani's assessment that Palestine was a fertile ground for conceptual reinvigoration for ethnographic investigation. I explained that this was due, in part, to scholars' reliance on constructionist theoretical positions with inadequate treatments of religion. I planted the disruption-improvisation seed in that fertile ground (to continue with the analogy). In the chapter's second-half, I showed that piety was a lacuna in the literature. Setting aside the work of British Mandate ethnographers, ethnographic work among Palestinians was neglected until the 1980s when scholars began developing an 'enabling vocabulary.' Since then, many valuable contributions have been made

—but piety has been overlooked. My ethnographic treatment of Muslim religious practices in Jerusalem would fill that gap.

I framed the rest of the study around the jazz improvisation analogy. In Chapter 4, I discussed the practiced element of ritual activity that allows Muslims in Jerusalem to draw from a diverse repertoire of themes to perform their ritual activities. The material allowed me to disentangle several complexities that accompany rituals in Jerusalem; specifically, the history of overlapping inter-faith religious practices, Palestinian nationalism, the structural features of Israel's settler-colonial project, recent political developments, and Palestinian political mobilization; which, I observed, was mainly improvisational, too. I concluded by highlighting the unique identity and experience of Jerusalemites. In Chapters 5, 6, and 7, I observed the dynamics of disruption and improvisation in action through specific case studies. I showed how Sheikh Abdul-Aziz al-Bukhari's improvisations at the Zawiyat al-Naqshbandi, while creative and well-intended, were too discordant for most Palestinians and fell flat. I observed in Chapter 6 multiple Ramadan improvisations that had resonances of protest and defined specific moments. Finally, in Chapter 7, I explored the *Murabitat's* improvisations and how they changed the way Palestinians understood and articulated their faith: they changed the course of the performance. Each case study showed how religious rituals are dynamic, responsive, and adaptable.

In the *Invention of Tradition*, Hobsbawm and Ranger made a point with particular relevance here: "it is their appearance [invented traditions] and establishment rather than their chances of survival which are our primary concern."⁶³⁵ There is value, that is to say, in capturing the brief moments when improvisations occur—whether they survive or not is beside the point. Rituals have a temporal structuring and appear to have fixity, by linking the cognitive and physical dimensions of human faith experiences moment-by-moment. In other words, people look to the past and future to make sense of their lives, but they do-the-looking in the present. The present is where people make sense of their lives,

⁶³⁵ Hobsbawm and Ranger, *The Invention of Tradition*, 1.

and rituals are a fundamental way they navigate. These dynamics have been a constant refrain throughout the study. They make the first half of the listening-space.

Where Might This Be Going...

...*before* the next decision is made? Here, I enter the second half of the listening-space and offer several speculations about where this study's insights may be going. Before I discuss specifics, however, I need to underscore one theme—that rituals tend to evolve more in societies that are weakened or threatened. I showed throughout the study that Jerusalem was replete with disruptions and that the disruption of religious rituals—be they physical or spatial, temporary or ongoing, aural, diffuse or institutional—are driven by Israel's settler-colonial project. My point here is that this specific dynamic is unlikely to change. Israel's settler-colonialism will not evaporate, and Muslim claims to the city will also remain. Israel will continue to disrupt Muslim religious practices, and Jerusalem's Muslims will continue to adapt, evolve, and improvise. This dynamic has negative and positive consequences. First, negatively, and in a general sense, Palestinian Muslims in the city will continue to see their presence challenged and eroded. Disruptions are structural, and they will continue to influence Muslim religious practices. This is a sad truth for Palestinians, but they will continue to resist. But given the number of complex and changing dynamics, I dare not speculate about the form or degree of future disruptions. The second negative consequence of the disruption-improvisation dynamic is that the empirical material of my case studies will have a short shelf-life. Circumstances have already changed. Take, for example, my work on Sufism in Jerusalem. The Zawiyat al-Naqshbandi closed in 2010 after Sheikh al-Bukhari's death. His only son was uninterested in keeping the Zawiya opened, and the property has been sold.⁶³⁶ The Naqshbandi no longer have an active presence in the city. Sufism—an important historical feature of Jerusalem—has vanished almost entirely.

⁶³⁶ Personal Interview, Old City Jerusalem, April 21, 2016.

On the positive side, even with the disruptions and the maddening frustrations they cause for Palestinians, Israel will never be able to dictate the way Muslims in Jerusalem understand and articulate their faith. Yes, Palestinian agency will be limited in massive and myriad ways, but I imagine that Jerusalemites will emphasize their religious rituals more with time (not because they are being ‘radicalized’ as Western media is likely to explain it) but because they are searching for meaning and stability in a deeply vulnerable and threatened city. The rituals of Jerusalem’s Muslims will evolve, too, and this will happen precisely because the people performing them are human. One of Kertzer’s insights from Chapter 1 bears repeating:

Rituals do change in form, in symbolic meaning, and in social effects; new rituals arise and old rituals fade away. These changes come through individual creative activity. People, in short, are not just slaves of ritual, or slaves of symbols, they are also molders and creators of ritual.⁶³⁷

Israel will never stop Muslims from using religious rituals to forge links between their bodies and their faith. Palestinian Muslims in Jerusalem will remain the molders and creators of their faith. They will improvise, looking for rituals that resonate.

Also positively, the disruption-improvisation mechanism is a promising analytical tool for evaluating ongoing developments in the city. Two relevant examples have already occurred: Israel’s *adhan* (call to prayer) restrictions and the al-Aqsa Mosque metal detectors. I discuss each briefly to illustrate. In early 2017, the Israeli Knesset passed legislation to restrict the volume of the *adhan* throughout Jerusalem.⁶³⁷ In some areas, it was banned outright. The law was justified with the same logic as the prohibitions of the *Musahharati* and the Ramadan cannon from Chapter 6—the sound bothered Jewish residents. But like other cases, the disruption made an affordance for creative improvisation. Jerusalemite Muslims got on their rooftops and performed *adhan al-fajr* (dawn call to prayer), defiantly. Some recorded

⁶³⁷ Jeremy Siegman, "Israel's "Muezzin Bill" and the Everyday Politics of Sound," *Palestine Square* (April 7, 2017), <https://palestinesquare.com/2017/04/07/israels-muezzin-bill-and-the-everyday-politics-of-sound/>; Jonathan Lis, "Israeli Lawmakers Give Initial Approval to Bill Targeting Mosque Loudspeakers," *Haaretz* (March 8, 2017), <http://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/.premium-1.775976>.

the calls on smart-phones and posted them on Youtube.⁶³⁸ The case is another example of Israel making claims to space through the disruption of sound and Palestinians using the symbolic power of rituals to express their resistance. Additionally, the Muslim of Issawiyya, an East Jerusalem neighborhood, had been constructing what was to be the largest minaret in Jerusalem when the restriction was announced. Hearing of the legislation, the project's lead engineer sped-up work intentionally so it would be complete before the law was implemented. Those interviewed for Arabic news outlets said it was a declaration of their determination to assert the Islamic identity of the city and their continued resolve to resist Israel's judaization (*tahwiyd*) of it.⁶³⁹ The project became a massive community effort and an overt act of defiance. The first *adhan* rang out from the new minaret the day Israel enforced the prohibition.

The second example occurred as I drafted this chapter. On July 14, 2017, violence erupted on the Haram al-Sharif when two young men from Um al-Fahm in Northern Israel opened fire and killed two Israeli soldiers at the Mosque's entrance.⁶⁴⁰ Other soldiers chased the assailants into the mosque and killed them. Israel then closed the mosque (and the Old City) and canceled Friday prayers the next day—the first time they had done so in many years. Over the next few days, Israeli soldiers scoured the mosque, ostensibly looking for weapons and evidence of further planned attacks. When Israel reopened the mosque, they had installed metal detectors, declaring that anyone who entered would be subject to search. But as readers are likely to guess, the metal detectors created an affordance for improvisation. Muslims were furious and refused to pass through the devices to enter the mosque. They began sitting outside al-Aqsa's gates and praying in the streets.

⁶³⁸ Maghrebi Lite, "al-Filistiniyun Yukabbiruwn Min Manazilihun Waqt al-Fajr Raddan 'ala Qarar Isra'il bi-Hazir al-'Adhan," *YouTube* (November 18, 2016), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=da83qLdwOVs>.

⁶³⁹ Aljazeera Mubasher, "al-Filistiniyun Yarudown 'ala Qarar Mana' al-Adhan bi-'Insha' Atwal Ma'dhina fi al-Quds," *YouTube* (March 18, 2017), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=x8ztsNaGbL0>.

⁶⁴⁰ For more details, see: Abdallah Marouf Omar, "Al-Aqsa Mosque's Incident in July 2017: Affirming the Policy of Deterrence," *Insight Turkey* 19, no. 3 (2017).

Jerusalem's Mufti, Muhammad al-Husseini, issued a *fatwa* (religious ruling), claiming that it was forbidden for Muslims to pass through the metal detectors. The Palestinian grievance was the same as it had been in Chapter 7—Israel was deliberately disrupting the Status Quo. Prayer demonstrations went on throughout the week. Mosque leaders and employees of the *waqf* called for all Mosques in Jerusalem and beyond to cancel their Friday services so every Muslim possible could come to al-Aqsa to defy Israel's disruption. Friday demonstrations were massive. King Abdullah of Jordan, the king of Saudi Arabia, and other international leaders called for Israel to remove the metal detectors. Israel's western allies affirmed their support to keep them in place. Eventually, Israel relented and removed the metal detectors and tensions dissolved. Jerusalemites were euphoric when they freely reentered their mosque. They had acted together and achieved a major victory. This religious improvisation had such resonance it shifted the dynamics of the conflict, changing the course of the performance.

While the *adhan* and metal detector cases happened after I left Jerusalem, I identified several other relevant cases but had to leave them aside due to time constraints. First, the rituals of *zakat* (alms) and *Hajj* (pilgrimage) would be fascinating to view through the lens of disruption and improvisation. How might Israeli monitoring and meddling in the practice shape the way alms are collected and distributed? How might Muslim religious authorities decide who should receive the donations when everyone has been harmed economically by the conflict and occupation?⁶⁴¹ Regarding *Hajj*, Israeli disruptions exist since the state determines who and under what circumstances Muslims enter and exit Israel. Travel authorizations, conflict generated economic constraints, and the influence of Israeli-Saudi relations would be interesting to examine. In recent years, for example, direct flights between the two countries have been discussed. How might those flights create affordances for new religious improvisations? The *zakat*

⁶⁴¹ I came across one study that addressed Zakat in Jerusalem tangentially. See, Jonathan Benthall, "The Palestinian Zakat Committees 1993-2007 and Their Contested Interpretations," (Geneva: Program for the Study of International Organizations), 2008.

and *Hajj* cases could also be helpful to develop a fuller understanding of institutional disruptions and their influence, particularly on a city-wide scale.

Second, Muslims religious practices in West Jerusalem would be another compelling case. A large percentage of the wage-labor workforce in West Jerusalem is Muslim. And due to their religion, these Muslims face multiple challenges. I encountered men who worked in Israeli restaurants, for example, who had been asked to trim their beards because customers did not like the 'Muslim' appearance. Others were made to work on Fridays, and working in Ramadan was a constant struggle to negotiate. A comparative study of these Muslim's experiences and those in other non-Muslim majority cities of the world would be interesting.

Third, a study on rituals surrounding the remembrance of Muhammad's Night Journey (*al-'Isra' wal-Mi'raj*) would be apropos. In the British Mandate and Jordanian periods, the holiday was patronized by influential political figures. Between 1948 and 1967, for example, King Abdullah I of Jordan deliberately used the annual celebration to legitimate his political authority as custodian of Jerusalem's Islamic holy sites.⁶⁴² Today, there are parades, scouts marches, and special activities throughout the city. And as one would expect, Israel regularly disrupts these events. In 2016, for instance, the Night Journey parade was canceled since it coincided with Holocaust Remembrance Day (Yom HaShoah).⁶⁴³ Also, the only remaining Sufi institution in Jerusalem, the Zawiyat al-Afghani, hosts a special celebration each year. I attended the gathering in 2016, and it was remarkable. A study on these festivities and how they are intertwined with the conflict would, indeed, be relevant and interesting.

Finally, I noticed that the dynamics I observed are transferable and scalable. They are relevant to the experience of contemporary Muslims in other contexts. The issue of religious freedom, for example,

⁶⁴² Katz, *Jordanian Jerusalem: Holy Places and National Spaces*, 111-17.

⁶⁴³ Wikalat Filistin al-Yawm al-Ikhbariyya, "al-Ihtilal Yamna' Masira Kashfiyya fi Dhikra al-Isra' Wal-Mi'raj bil-Quds," (June 05, 2016), <https://paltoday.ps/ar/post/270003>.

is particularly applicable. How might the national-level negotiations between religious institutions and State apparatuses, expressed legislatively and articulated through the discourse of religious freedom, constitute disruptions and improvisations?⁶⁴⁴ I gave brief attention to this in Chapter 5 with Sufism and Sufi's global positioning, but the dynamic bears consideration beyond this. Another example of a transferable and scalable dynamic would be the transformation of religious authority during social upheaval. How do religious institutions respond (improvise?) in response to social revolutions and political regime changes? How might they configure and reconfigure their authoritative positions to sustain legitimacy during times of social change?

Early in the study, I declared my bold aspiration—that I hoped the study would spark 'conceptual reinvigoration.' I pointed out that when scholars have explored religion among Palestinians, they have done so primarily from constructionists positions that are largely dismissive of religion. They see religion as something that must be 'looked past' to grasp what is 'really' going on. But I have argued alongside Lara Deeb and claimed that faith is—in fact—what is going on.⁶⁴⁵ Faith is no facade. I also noticed that scholars had an unexamined theoretical assumption in their understandings of ritual—that people who desire to perform them have the routine capacity to act on their intentions. I asked, simply, what happens when people are prevented from acting on their ritual intentions? I showed that disruptions interfere with the link between the cognitive and physical dimensions of faith and that they allow people to adapt their rituals physically and discursively, inflecting the meaning they attribute to them. As exciting as these insights are personally, I come to the end of my study with a modest admission: the 'conceptual reinvigoration' I aim to spark is ultimately in the hands of

⁶⁴⁴ Elizabeth Hurd's work addresses these dynamics deftly, but more comprehensive analyses could be done on religious practices particularly. Elizabeth Shakman Hurd, *Beyond Religious Freedom: The New Global Politics of Religion* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2015).

⁶⁴⁵ Deeb, *An Enchanted Modern: Gender and Public Piety in Shi'i Lebanon*, 40.

others. All I can do now is remain attentive in the listening-space: where might this improvisation be going?

Enjoying the Music

At the outset of the study, I included an excerpt from my fieldnotes. I was on the Haram al-Sharif with the *Murabitat*, tourists, settlers, and Israeli security. As I wove through the tense sacred space making observations, I met two young men who jumped The Wall because they wanted to pray in al-Aqsa Mosque for Ramadan. The reserved one said it was his first time, that he had always been forbidden. But on that day, at that moment in that sacred space, despite all the conflict and tension, he proclaimed, “*This day is the most beautiful day of my life.*”⁶⁴⁶

The comment has stayed with me since he made it, and I have puzzled over where it belongs in the study. It would be appropriate in several places, yet none seemed right. But now it is clear; his story fits best here at the end—not to be dissected or analyzed—but to be taken for what it is. In jazz, there are times to woodshed and practice, times to consider improvisational effects and enter listening-spaces. But there are also times when the best thing to do is feel it, to enjoy the flow of the music. As this young man was having the most beautiful day of his life, I cannot help but think: he had been drawn in by a beautiful tune—a tune I have loosely titled, *Living Islam in Jerusalem*.

⁶⁴⁶ *hayda al-yom ajmal yom bi-hayati*

Annex 1: Glossary of Arabic Terms

Arabic Term	English Equivalence
<i>'alim (pl. 'ulama)</i>	Islamic scholar
<i>'awra</i>	pudendum
<i>'eid al-Adha</i>	Feast of the Sacrifice
<i>'eid al-Fitr</i>	The 'Little Feast' at the end of Ramadan
<i>'umra</i>	Minor pilgrimage to Mecca
<i>'abaya</i>	a long, black women's cloak
<i>al-'adat wa al-taqalid</i>	customs and traditions
<i>al-'Isra' wal-Mi'raj</i>	Muhammad's Night Journey
<i>al-din</i>	religion
<i>al-Fatiha</i>	opening chapter of the Qur'an
<i>al-Haram al-Sharif</i>	The Noble Sanctuary
<i>al-hamdulilah</i>	Praise God
<i>al-Masjid al-Aqsa</i>	The Furthest Mosque
<i>al-Naqba</i>	The Catastrophe (ref. 1948 war)
<i>al-Naqsa</i>	The Loss (ref. 1967 war)
<i>al-Qibli Mosque</i>	Mosque commemorating first Islamic direction of prayer; located at southern end of the Haram al-Sharif
<i>al-Quds</i>	Jerusalem
<i>al-Ram</i>	East Jerusalem suburb on north outskirts of the city.
<i>al-Sira al-Nabawiyya</i>	Biography of the Prophet
<i>al-Sunna al-Nabawiyya</i>	Traditions of the Prophet
<i>al-Uzbakiyya</i>	alternative name for the Zawiyat al-Naqshbandi in Jerusalem
<i>Allah</i>	God
<i>Allahu Akbar</i>	God is Great

Arabic Term	English Equivalence
<i>as-Salamu 'alaykum (wa 'alaykum as-Salam)</i>	Peace be upon you (and also upon you)
<i>adhan</i>	call to prayer
<i>Ayyubid</i>	historic dynasty (c. 1174-1250) founded by Saladin
<i>Bab al-'amoud</i>	Damascus Gate
<i>Bab al-asbat</i>	Lion's Gate
<i>Bab al-khalil</i>	Jaffa Gate
<i>Bab al-Magharbi</i>	The Moroccan Gate
<i>Bab al-Rahma</i>	The Gate of Mercy; also known as the Golden Gate
<i>Bab al-Silsila</i>	The Gate of the Chain
<i>Bab al-Sahira</i>	Herod's Gate
<i>Bab Hitta</i>	northwest gate for the Haram al- Sharif; name of surrounding Old City community
<i>bai'a</i>	allegiance
<i>Baqa al-Gharbiyya</i>	a town centrally located in Israel
<i>Bayt al-Maqdis</i>	an alternative name for Jerusalem
<i>bid'a</i>	innovation, heresy
<i>da'wa</i>	call; invite someone to Islam
<i>dabka</i>	traditional Palestinian dance
<i>dhikr</i>	remembrance of God; a Sufi ritual
<i>dhikr jahri</i>	vocal remembrance of God
<i>dhikr khafi</i>	silent remembrance of God
<i>dishdasha</i>	a long white robe worn by men
<i>du'a'</i>	supplication; invocation of God
<i>Fada'il al-Quds</i>	The Virtues of Jerusalem
<i>fajr</i>	dawn; just before sunrise; time of first call to prayer
<i>fath</i>	opening / conquest

Arabic Term	English Equivalence
<i>fatwa (pl. fatawa)</i>	legal opinion by Islamic scholar or jurist
<i>hadith (pl. ahadith)</i>	saying and traditions attributed to the Prophet Muhammad
<i>hajj</i>	pilgrimage to Mecca; the fifth pillar of Islam
<i>al-halaqat al-‘ilmiyya</i>	learning circles
<i>hasanat</i>	blessings
<i>hijab</i>	women’s head-scarf
<i>i’tikaf</i>	dedicating time to God in a mosque
<i>iftar</i>	meal breaking fast after sunset during Ramadan
<i>imam</i>	prayer leader
<i>Intifada</i>	lit. to be shaken off; be dusted off; name for two Palestinian uprisings
<i>ism al-dhat</i>	lit. ‘name of The Self,’ a moniker for God
<i>iman</i>	faith, belief
<i>jihad</i>	lit. struggle
<i>jilbab</i>	a women’s long, flowing outer garment
<i>khalas</i>	That’s it; enough; stop
<i>khalwat dar anjuman</i>	Solitude in the Crowd
<i>khanqah</i>	building for sufi gatherings
<i>khitam</i>	a complete reading of the Qur’an
<i>khutba</i>	Friday address (sermon) given by an Imam in a mosque.
<i>kufiyya</i>	the traditional male Palestinian head-covering
<i>laylat al-qadr</i>	The Night of Power (in Ramadan)
<i>madfa‘ ramadan</i>	Ramadan cannon

Arabic Term	English Equivalence
<i>madrasa (pl. madaras)</i>	school
<i>maghrib</i>	sunset; time of fourth call to pray each day
<i>maqam</i>	tomb of a saint; sacred space
<i>maqbara</i>	cemetery
<i>Maqbara al-Mujahidin</i>	The Martyr's Graveyard north of Jerusalem's Old City
<i>masatib al-'ilm</i>	learning circles in the Haram al-Sharif
<i>mastaba (pl. masatib)</i>	lit. a raised platform
<i>minbar</i>	pulpit; rostrum
<i>Mount Hira</i>	the mountain where Muhammad received his first divine revelation
<i>mu'adhhdhin</i>	the person who performs the <i>adhan</i> , call to prayer
<i>mufti</i>	an Islamic religious leader who issues authoritative religious opinions, <i>fatwa / fatawa</i>
<i>Mujahidin</i>	warriors / fighters
<i>muqawama</i>	resistance
<i>murabit(a) (pl. murabitin / murabitat)</i>	defender(s); See also <i>ribat</i>
<i>myrid (pl. myridun)</i>	Sufi apprentice
<i>musahharati</i>	young men who wake people for <i>suhur</i> meal during Ramadan
<i>mutadayyin</i>	religious
<i>mutashshadid</i>	extremist
<i>nabi</i>	prophet
<i>Nabi Musa</i>	The Prophet Moses
<i>niqab</i>	veil
<i>niyya</i>	intention
<i>Qala' Mosque</i>	Old City Mosque near Jaffa Gate

Arabic Term	English Equivalence
<i>Qalandia</i>	Palestinian village and refugee camp; site of Israeli checkpoint connecting Jerusalem to the Ramallah corridor
<i>qibla</i>	direction of Prayer
<i>Qubbat al-Sakhra</i>	The Dome of the Rock
<i>Qur'an</i>	Islam's Holy book; God's revelation to Muhammad
<i>Ramadan</i>	ninth month of Islamic calendar year; the month of fasting
<i>ribat</i>	the act of standing guard; defending
<i>sadaqa (pl. sadaqat)</i>	good deed; voluntary charitable giving
<i>sahih</i>	lit. 'correct'; used to indicate that a particular <i>hadith</i> is strong or reliable
<i>salla allahu 'alayhi wa-sallam</i>	"God's Prayers and Peace Be Upon Him"; intoned after saying the name of the Prophet
<i>salam</i>	peace
<i>salat al-fajr</i>	dawn prayer
<i>sawm</i>	fasting
<i>shahada</i>	the Muslim confession of faith and first pillar of Islam: "There is no god but God, and Muhammad is the messenger of God."
<i>Shari'a</i>	Islamic Law
<i>sheikh</i>	religious leader
<i>silsila</i>	chain of transmitters/authority
<i>sufi</i>	muslim mystic
<i>suhur</i>	pre-dawn Ramadan meal
<i>sumud</i>	steadfastness

Arabic Term	English Equivalence
<i>Sunna</i>	the normative example of the Prophet
<i>Sunni</i>	the largest branch of Islam
<i>sura (pl. suwar)</i>	a chapter of the Qur'an
<i>tahwiyd</i>	Judaization
<i>takbiyr</i>	to declare God's greatness—i.e. say "Allahu Akbar"
<i>tarawih</i>	encouraged post-iftar prayers during Ramadan
<i>tariqa (pl. turuq)</i>	a Sufi brotherhood
<i>tasawwuf</i>	Sufism
<i>tatbiy'</i>	normalization
<i>thawb</i>	traditional Palestinian dress
<i>Um Fahem</i>	a city in Northern Israel
<i>Umayyad</i>	Historical dynasty (c.661-750) and first major caliphate after Muhammad
<i>waqf (pl. awqaf)</i>	Islamic endowment
<i>waqt al-imsak</i>	time of restraint; starting time of daily Ramadan fast
<i>wudu'</i>	ablution; washing
<i>zakat</i>	alms
<i>zawiya</i>	Sufi meeting place

Annex 2: Research Participants

109 different people interviewed.

240 - total number of notes based on interactions, interviews, and significant exchanges. (I interacted with many people additional people and did not take notes. I have not attempted to account for those interactions here).

68 - total number of interviews audio recorded.

8 - total number of group interviews.

Gender breakdown: 90 men (83%) and 19 women (17%).

74 additional people during participation observation.

Gender Breakdown: 57 men (77%) and 17 women (23%).

Total interactions: 108 + 74 = **183**

gender breakdown: 147 men total (80%) and 36 women total (20%).

* Instead of writing people's names, I assigned them numbers.

** I only gave pseudonyms to people I quote directly in the study.

*** To honor the interviewees request, I did not change the name.

Research Participants

Number*	Pseudonym**	Field notes	Ethnographic Interviews
101	Nour	April 30, 2013, October 28th 2013 Nov. 5th 2013 Nov. 15, 2013 April 15, 2014 May 6, 2014 August 5, 2014 August 30, 2014 June 24, 2015 August 24, 2015 July 19, 2016	
102	Marwan	July 13, 2013 April 7, 2014 May 20, 2014 July 8, 2015 July 8, 2015 September 2, 2015	

Number*	Pseudonym**	Field notes	Ethnographic Interviews
103	Mamdouh	Oct. 3, 2013 August 5, 2013 April 14, 2014 May 15, 2014 June 23, 2014 September 2, 2015	May 21, 2014
104	Abu Khalid	April 14, 2014	
105		Feb. 20, 2014 June 23, 2014 July 10, 2016	
106		July 13, 2013 April 7, 2014 May 20, 2014 July 8, 2015 September 2, 2015	
107	Amal	Feb. 7, 2014 April 1, 2014	June 29, 2014
108	Mustafa Abu Sway***	June 2, 2015 Nov. 3, 2015 Nov. 15, 2015 Nov. 19-22, 2015 May 5, 2016	Feb. 17, 2014 (Ar.) May 10, 2015 (Ar.) April 28, 2016 (En.) July 20, 2016 (En.)
109		Feb. 9, 2014	
110		March 3, 2014	
111	Omar	Nov. 5, 2013 Nov. 14, 2014 April 2, 2014	Jan 29, 2014
112		Sept. 15, 2013 Oct. 2, 2013 Oct 30, 2013 Aug. 28, 2014	
113	Saleh	Oct. 24, 2013 Oct. 14, 2014 Oct. 12, 2015 June 1, 2016	April 8, 2014
114		Sept. 30, 2013	
115		May 14, 2014 July 29, 2014	
116		May 14, 2014 July 29, 2014	
117		May 14, 2014 July 29, 2014	
118		May 14, 2014 July 29, 2014	
119		May 14, 2014 July 29, 2014	

Number*	Pseudonym**	Field notes	Ethnographic Interviews
120		April 15, 2014	
121		May 14, 2014 July 29, 2014	
122		May 14, 2014 July 29, 2014	
123		April 15, 2014	
124	Rami	April 22, 2014 May 5, 2015	
125		Oct. 3, 2013 August 5, 2013 April 14, 2014	
126		May 15, 2014 June 23, 2014 September 2, 2015	
127		Feb. 2013	
128	Abdullah		June 9, 2014
129		Sept. 15, 2013 Sept. 19, 2013	
130		May 6, 2013	
131	Majid	May 20, 2014	
132	Waleed		May 22, 2014
133		June 8, 2014 August 21, 2014	
134			June 24, 2014
135	Mahmood		June 24, 2014
136	Nisreen		June 26, 2014 July 25, 2014 July 11, 2016
137	Yusuf	July 2, 2014 August 13, 2014 June 23, 2015 June 26, 2015	June 26, 2014
138	Muhammad		June 25, 2014
139	Ra'id	June 15, 2014 July 2, 2014 July 10, 2014 Sept 21, 2014 June 30, 2015 April 21, 2016	
140	Ismael***	June 23, 2015	June 26, 2014 August 18, 2014

Number*	Pseudonym**	Field notes	Ethnographic Interviews
141	Khaled		Aug. 25, 2014
142	Basel al-Husseini***	May 13, 2014	Aug. 25, 2014
143		Oct. 16, 2015	
144		Oct. 8, 2014 Oct. 12, 2014 Oct. 14, 2014 Oct. 22, 2014 Oct. 27, 2014 Nov. 12, 2014 May 8, 2015	
145	Ahmed	Sept. 27, 2015 Sept. 28, 2015 Oct. 12, 2015 July 10, 2015 July 23, 2015 July 28, 2015 Sept 13, 2015 Sept 24, 2015 Oct. 12, 2015	Sept. 1, 2015 Sept. 8, 2015 Sept. 21 2015 Nov. 21 2015
146		July 8 ,2015 July 21, 2015 Sept. 13, 2015 Sept 27, 2015 Feb. 17, 2016 Feb. 28, 2016 June 1, 2016 July 3, 2016 July 19, 2016 July 10, 2015 July 14, 2015 May 30, 2016 July 23, 2015 July 28, 2015 Oct 2, 2015	Sept. 16 2015
147		July 10, 2015 July 23, 2015	July 28, 2015
148		Feb. 4 2014 March 9, 2015 March 17, 2015 July 7, 2015 July 14, 2015 July 21, 2015 July 24, 2015 Nov. 11, 2015	
149		April 8, 2015	
150		April 21, 2015	
151		April 25 (ish) 2015 June 30, 2015 June 30, 2015 July 22, 2015 Nov 17 2015 April 25, 2016	

Number*	Pseudonym**	Field notes	Ethnographic Interviews
152		May 4, 2015	
153		May 4, 2015	
154		May 6, 2015	May 7, 2015
155		April 30, 2015	
156		April 30, 2015	
157		May 6, 2015	
158		June 26, 2015 June 30, 2015	
159		August 13, 2014 June 26, 2015	
160		Sept 21, 2014 June 30, 2015	
161		July 10, 2015 June. 30. 2015	
162			July 5, 2015
163		July 1, 2015	
164		July 2, 2015	
165		Jan. 4, 2014 Jan. 13, 2014 March 11, 2015	
166		Jan. 4, 2014 Jan. 13, 2014 March 11, 2015	
167		July 10, 2015	
168		July 12, 2015 Sept 21, 2015 Nov. 8, 2015	April 26, 2016
169	Khadija	Sept 24, 2015	Sept. 13, 2015
170		Sept. 13, 2015 Sept 27, 2015	
171		Nov. 17, 2015	Sept. 27, 2015
172			Sept. 28, 2015
173	Yahya		Sept 30, 2015
174			Oct. 1, 2015
175		Oct. 23, 2015	Oct. 8, 2015
176		Sept 17, 2015	

Number*	Pseudonym**	Field notes	Ethnographic Interviews
177			November 9, 2015 December 3, 2015
178			Nov. 30, 2015
179		Jan 21, 2016	
180	Amina	Nov. 17, 2015	Feb. 10, 2016
181	Mariam		Feb. 10, 2016
182			Feb. 10, 2016
183	Muneeb		Feb. 12, 2016
184		Feb. 11. 2016	July 25, 2016
185			Feb. 17, 2016
186			Feb. 17, 2016
187		May 4, 2016	Feb. 17, 2016
188			Feb. 17, 2016
189			Feb. 17, 2016
190			Feb. 17, 2016
191			Feb. 17, 2016
192		Feb. 17, 2015	
193			July 29, 2015 April 18, 2016
194			April 19, 2016
195			April 20, 2016
196	Yusuf Natceh	April 4, 2015	May 4, 2016 July 11, 2016
197		April 21, 2016	
198		April 4, 2015, May 4, 2016, July 11, 2016	
199			July 26, 2016
200		July 28, 2016	
201		July 26, 2016	
202		June 8,2014	
203		July 19, 2015 July 22, 2015 July 19, 2016	
204		July 19, 2016	

Number*	Pseudonym**	Field notes	Ethnographic Interviews
205		July 19, 2016	
206			September 20, 2014
207		July 1, 2015	
208	Abu Saleem	September 13, 2013	
209	Salema	July 15, 2016	

Participant Observation

Number	FieldNotes Random
401	April 15, 2014
402	Nov. 15, 2013
403	September 2, 2015
404	September 2, 2015
405	September 2, 2015
406	March 23, 2014
407	April 7, 2014
408	June 23, 2014
409	August 5, 2013
410	May 15, 2014
411	No Date recorded
412	July 10, 2015
413	July 3, 2015
414	April 1, 2014
415	May 5, 2015
416	May 14, 2014
417	July 14, 2015
418	Feb. 2013
419	Sept. 4, 2014
420	Sept 4, 2014

Number	FieldNotes Random
421	September 2, 2015
422	June 26, 2014
423	June 26, 2014
424	April 3, 2016
425	March 17, 2015
426	March 17, 2015
427	No date recorded
428	July 22, 2015
429	July 22, 2015
430	Feb, 4, 2016
431	Nov. 17, 2015 May 4, 2016
432	July 16, 2016
433	October 1, 2014
434	October 1, 2014
435	December 28, 2015
436	April 9, 2016
436	April 9, 2016
437	May 9, 2014
438	May 9, 2014
439	May 9, 2014
440	May 9, 2014
441	May 9, 2014
442	Sept 2, 2015
443	May 5, 2015
444	June 23, 2016
445	January 30, 2016
446	Nov. 14, 2015
447	Feb. 2013
448	Feb. 7, 2013
449	Feb. 9, 2013

Number	FieldNotes Random
450	Feb. 17, 2013
451	Feb. 17, 2013
452	March 10, 2014
453	Aug 27, 2014
454	Sept. 2, 2014
455	March 15, 2014
456	Aug 15, 2015
457	April 28, 2015
458	June 23, 2015
459	July 8, 2015
460	July 10, 2015
461	July 13, 2015
462	July 15, 2015 July 16, 2015
463	July 15, 2015
464	July 15, 2015 July 16, 2015
465	July 16, 2015
466	Sept 24, 2015
467	Sept 24, 2015
468	Oct. 4, 2015
469	Oct. 8, 2015
470	Dec. 3, 2015
471	May 3, 2015
472	May 3, 2015
473	May 3, 2015
474	May 5, 2015

Annex 3: The *Imam's* Supplication⁶⁴⁷

Translation	Transliteration	Arabic
Oh God, possessor of splendor and might	<i>allahumma ya dha al-jalal wa al-'uzza</i>	اللهم يا ذا الجلال و العزة
Protect the Muslims in Gaza	<i>unsur al-muslimiyn fi Ghazza</i>	أُنصُرُ المسلمين في غزة
Oh God, be for them a supporter and protector	<i>allahumma kun lahum 'aunan wa nasiran.</i>	اللهم كن لهم عوناً ونصيراً
Oh Lord of the worlds	<i>ya rabb al-'almin</i>	يا رب العالمين
Aim their shooting	<i>saddid ramyahum</i>	سَدِّدْ رميهم
Oh, God	<i>ya Allah</i>	(يا الله)
Aim their shooting	<i>saddid ramyahum</i>	سَدِّدْ رميهم
Oh, God	<i>ya Allah</i>	(يا الله)
Aim their shooting	<i>saddid ramyahum</i>	سَدِّدْ رميهم
Oh, God	<i>ya Allah</i>	(يا الله)
Oh God, [it is] upon you [to avenge], [those] who harm them and fight them	<i>allahuma 'alayka bi-man adhahum wa 'adahum</i>	اللهم عليك بمن آذاهم و عاداهم
Oh God, we beseech you to slaughter our enemies	<i>allahumma inna naj'aluka fi nuhur a'da'ina</i>	اللهم إِنَّا نجعلُك في نحور أعدائنا
Oh God, stone their number and kill them completely	<i>allahumma ihsihim 'adada wa uqtulhum bidada</i>	اللهم إحصهم عدد و أقتلهم بدد
And don't leave one of them	<i>wa la tughadir minhum ahad</i>	ولا تغادر منهم احدا
Make the evil circle encompass them.	<i>wa ija'al da'irat al-su' tadour 'alayhim</i>	وإجعل دائرة السوء تدور عليهم

⁶⁴⁷ Arafah, "Jum'a 2014-7-18 al-Quds al-Masjid al-Aqsa al-Mubarak Fajran. Wa al-Du'a lil-Mujahidiyn bi-Gaza," Min.1 Sec. 45.

Translation	Transliteration	Arabic
Oh God, show us a black day for them, like the day of Pharaoh	<i>allahumma arina bihim yawman aswad yawm kayawm fir'awn</i>	اللهم أرنا يوماً أسود يوم كيوم فرعون
A day like the day of Thamud	<i>yawm ka-yawm thamoud.</i>	يوم كيوم ثمود
Oh Lord of the worlds	<i>ya rabb al-'almin</i>	يا رب العالمين
Oh God, Oh God, Oh God	<i>ya Allah, ya Allah, ya Allah</i>	يا الله, يا الله, يا الله
As you protected the Muslims in Mecca	<i>kama nasarta al-Muslimin fi makkah</i>	كما نصرت المسلمين في مكة
protect our family in Gaza	<i>unsur ahlina fi Ghazza</i>	أنصر أهلنا في غزة

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