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# The cantor and the muezzin's duet: contested soundscapes at Jerusalem's Western Wall

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# The cantor and the muezzin's duet: contested soundscapes at Jerusalem's Western Wall

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Whether pictured close-up with a single orthodox Jew at prayer, in wide-angle set below the Dome of the Rock and al-Aqsa mosque, or as a backdrop to the visits of heads of State and religious figures, the huge, chiselled limestone blocks of the Western Wall form one of contemporary Jerusalem's most visually iconic sites. Consensually recognised as the most important Jewish religious site in Israel, it is a place where religious Jewish and national Israeli narratives converge. Today's familiar fifty-seven metre stretch of wall represents one of the few surviving remnants of the Second Temple, from which, according to Jewish tradition, the Divine Presence never departed.[1] Following the destruction of the Temple in 70 CE, religious and historical sources document that Jews returned to the wall or the nearby Mount of Olives to lament the destruction of the holy places.[2] While the Western Wall and its environs were prominently contested between Jews and Arabs during the years leading up to the establishment of the state of Israel, its present significance in the Israeli national narrative was cemented in 1967, when it became a focal point of the Israeli victory in the Six Day War, iconized in David Rubinger's photograph of three paratroopers standing at the foot of the wall.[3]

The physical properties of the wall as a historical and archaeological site and the role of the Western Wall in Israeli religious and national mythology have been discussed at length by scholars; the significance of the Western Wall in the 1967 Israeli victory and the subsequent hasty razing of the neighbouring Mughrabi quarter to create today's large plaza is likewise retold in countless popular and scholarly histories of Jerusalem. Most historians leave the Western Wall at this point, a renewed and iconic Jewish-Israel religious and national symbolic space (Zerubavel 1995, 133). Nevertheless, if the physical appearance of the wall and plaza has changed little since 1967, the human fabric of the space is constantly in flux. The open plaza forms a flexible and resonant physical and conceptual space within which contrasting Jewish and Israeli practices and narratives jostle shoulder to shoulder, simultaneously enacting tradition and modernity; conservatism and creativity.

In this article, I suggest that a shift in sensory modality might productively refocus and complicate our readings of the Western Wall plaza, showing how normative national and religious narratives are actively produced, jostled, negotiated and undermined by the individuals who use the site on a daily basis. If visually, our gaze is drawn to the symbolically laden stones of the wall, pricking one's ears in the Western Wall plaza invites immediate awareness of proximity and difference. Sunk into the valley, sloping downwards towards the wall itself, and flanked on two of the remaining three sides by stone buildings. A resonant stone box, the plaza tends to excludes sounds from outside, and to reflect those produced inside, joining all who use the plaza in a forced co-presence, listening in by choice or by coercion to the embodied presence of others in the space whose sounds fade in and out of the ever-changing soundscape: prayers spoken in anything from a whisper to a loud voice, parents calling to children, the rustling of sandwich papers, the calls of a flock of swifts, the words of a tour guide, faint sounds of

[1] The lower stones of the Western Wall formed part of Herod's renovation programme of the Temple. See Frenkel, 2009 for detailed discussion of the place of the Temple in Jewish thought from 70 CE until the present day.
[2] See League of Nations report, 1930, section 3. While the Mount of Olives was also an important location for the prayers of visiting Jews, multiple sources cite the church father Jerome (4th century CE) in establishing the antiquity of the Jewish practice of lamentation at the Western Wall.
[3] See Monk, 2005, for discussion of the symbolic nature of this photograph.

drumming, the call of the muezzin from the Al-Aqsa mosque and the hammers of construction workers.

In the following discussion, building upon the 'auditory turn' which has gained traction in anthropology and ethnomusicology over the last two decades (Porcello et al, 2010, 55), I show how the politics of presence, proximity and voice—on an individual, communal and national level—are not only built into the physical location of the space, but are also creatively enacted and contested by the individuals and groups who come there to pray. Sometimes this sonic encounter is one of loud coexistence, echoing the traditional soundscapes of Jewish prayer in which the sound of the community is articulated through the heterophonic sounds of individuals; sometimes, however, the encounter transgresses the boundaries of heterophonic coexistence, revealing and inflaming points of friction and non-consensus and reminding those present that the Western Wall is also located on a seamline in human geography; a point of interface between internal Jewish and Israeli struggles and the wider Middle East conflict. To illustrate this interplay of sounds and narratives, I begin by surveying the sonic space of the Western Wall plaza, recalling the history of sound disputes in this space that precedes current uses of the space, then introducing the range of sounds that constitute the auditory life of the plaza today. I then explore the sonic contestation of religious and national narratives in the day-to-day life of plaza in greater depth via three case studies drawn from ethnographic fieldwork undertaken from 2009-2014, which illustrate the role of interruptive sounds at the Western Wall in reconfiguring the frameworks within which its meanings are parsed.

**Listening to the past**

Sound—and sonic contestation—has played a surprisingly prominent role in the history of the Western Wall space. The practice of Jewish vocal lamentation at the site—from which the English term 'Wailing Wall', and the Arabic 'el-Mabka' ('the place of weeping') were derived—was described frequently by nineteenth-century Christian visitors, for whom it served as a tourist attraction: in 1888, New Zealand's Waikato Times reported, 'It is one of the most affecting sights in that city of strange memories to see the 'ancient people' standing there, psalter in hand, wailing out words which have a singular significance in that place. The place is sacred with the tears of many generations…' (2) Recalling a visit to the wall in 1932, Harvard's George Sarton identified the weeping practice with older, religious men (1954, 75), whom he explicitly contrasts with the younger Jewish colonists creating the modern state of Israel.

As increasing numbers of Jews immigrated to Palestine from the late nineteenth century onwards and began to visit and pray at the wall, tensions rose between local Arab and Jewish populations. The prayer space next to the Wall—part of a passageway less than four metres wide, belonging to a North African endowment and leading to houses in the Mughrabi quarter built in the thirteenth century to house Muslim Moroccan pilgrims—was an increasingly focal point of national, political and religious disputes between Zionist Jews and Muslims; the former attempting to acquire ownership of the Wall, and the latter countering Jewish claims to the wall by identifying the wall with the place where the prophet Mohammed tethered his miraculous beast—*al-buraq*—during *al-miraj*, his nocturnal journey from Mecca.[4] In 1929, disputes between Muslims and Jews about rights at the wall became more heated, eventually leading to major violent riots in August 1929 throughout Palestine in which 133 Jews and 116 Arabs lost their lives. Sari Nusseibeh locates the beginning of the 'al-Buraq revolt' in sound: that of young

[4] See Reiter and Seligman, 2009, 238-9 and Qleibo, 2000, 40-41. Among many histories of Jerusalem, Armstrong, 1996, and Goldhill, 2008, also survey this historical period and subsequent developments.

supporters of Jabotinsky marching to the Wall shouting 'The Wall is ours!' and singing Hatikvah. (2007, 30-32)

In the wake of the riots, the British authorities, supported by the League of Nations, appointed a commission 'to determine the rights and claims of Moslems and Jews in connection with the Western or Wailing Wall at Jerusalem' (League of Nations Report, 1930). Both sides cite sound in their claims for rights at the space: the Muslim representatives refer to an 1840 decree from Ibrahim Pasha cautioning the Jews against 'raising their voices' at the Wall (ibid, appendix VI), whereas the Jews entreat that 'the Arabs should be prohibited from disturbing the Jewish services by leading donkeys through the passage or by installing a muezzin in the neighbourhood of the Wall or by conducting the Zikhr [sic] ritual in the courtyard at the southern end of the Pavement, to which the Jews object because of the concomitant disagreeable noise.' (ibid, section IV.2) The commission concluded with recommendations that spoke directly to the sound disputes:

> (5) The Jews shall not be permitted to blow the ram's horn (Shofar) near the Wall nor cause any other disturbance to the Moslems that is avoidable; the Moslems on the other hand shall not be permitted to carry out the Zikr ceremony close to the Pavement during the progress of the Jewish devotions or to cause annoyance to the Jews in any other way. […] (7) It shall be prohibited for any person or persons to make use of the place in front of the Wall or its surroundings for all political speeches or utterances or demonstrations of any kind whatever.[5]

This history of sound disputation and perceived domination forms an important backdrop to the recent history of the Western Wall and its environs. From 1948-67, the Western Wall, along with the rest of the Old City, was under Jordanian control. Its capture by Israeli paratroopers was a defining moment of the 1967 war. The Israeli victory was marked by sounds, broadcast on Israeli radio: paratroop commander Motta Gur's live-broadcast announcement 'har habayit beyadenu!' ('The Temple Mount is in our hands!'); soldiers singing 'Hatikvah' ('The Hope', Israel's national anthem) and Naomi Shemer's recently composed 'Yerushalayim shel Zahav' ('Jerusalem of Gold') on the Temple mount; army rabbi Shlomo Goren's shofar blasts on the Temple Mount and the Western Wall.[6] Daniel Monk identifies these sounds—which index the transformation of the soundscape of the Western Wall from one of mourning for the lost Temple to one of celebration—not only as instant icons of the Israeli victory, but also as intervening in the convergence of religious and national ideologies at the newly captured Western Wall. He notes that critics would 'not just implicate, but actually come to see music as both evidence for, and instrument of, an effort to render Israel and Judaism into the respective means for one another's ends.' (2005, 168)

In this context, Goren's shofar blasts were doubly resonant. First, via the symbolism of the instrument, he juxtaposed this particular historic moment with significant Biblical moments linked to the shofar, from the binding of Isaac, to the Sinaitic revelation, to the capture of Jericho by Joshua.[7] These meanings resounded with the moment of Israeli euphoria, and also with fervour of religious-nationalist groups who read the 1967 victory in messianic terms; a concrete indication of God's intervention in the future of the Jewish people. Second, the shofar blasts were an emphatically statement of Israeli

[5] Palestine (Western or Wailing Wall) Order in Council, 1931, reproduced at http://unispal.un.org/UNISPAL.NSF/0/C2567D9C6F6CE5D8052565D9006EFC72, appendix 1.
[6] See Monk, 2005, 170-1.
[7] In the latter three cases, the sound of the shofar is mentioned in the Biblical narrative itself; later Rabbinic literature additionally links the shofar with the ram Abraham sacrificed instead of his son Isaac (see Mishna Brura on Shulchan Aruch OH 596:1).

presence and sovereignty, simultaneously overturning the explicit ban of the 1931 British commission on sounding the shofar in the Western Wall space and the years of Jordanian rule under which access to the wall was impossible for Israeli Jews. The sound of the shofar blasts was quickly translated into other media: a famous photograph shows Major-General Shlomo Goren, the chief rabbi of the Israel Defence Forces, at the Western Wall, a Torah scroll in his arm, raising a *shofar* to his lips; the sound of the shofar was also written by Naomi Shemer into a new verse for her song 'Yerushalayim shel Zahav' ('Jerusalem of Gold'):

> We have returned to the water cisterns, the market and the square!
> A shofar calls on the Temple Mount, in the Old City.[8]

The immediate wake of the war marked a further transformation of the sound space at the wall. Shortly after the war, the Mughrabi quarter bordering on the Western Wall, then home to 135 Muslim families, and Muslim holy places including two mosques, was knocked down to clear a large plaza in front of the wall. Gershom Gorenberg notes that the decision to raze the neighbourhood, 'in a twilight time between war and the first formal government discussions of postwar policy' (2006, 44-45), created facts on the ground which emphasized Israeli control over the Old City. The end of the war neatly dovetailed with the Jewish pilgrimage festival Shavuot, during which 200,000 Jewish Israelis streamed to the newly cleared plaza.[9] Overnight, then, the voices of Muslims of the Mughrabi Quarter were silenced by expulsion; while today the sonic juxtaposition of Jewish and Muslim sacred spaces continues to resound in the Western Wall plaza, Jewish and Muslim prayer spaces are firmly delineated and distanced both conceptually and by hard security infrastructure.

**Sounding the Western Wall plaza today**

While the creation of the Western Wall plaza in 1967 distanced everyday spatial contestation between Muslims and Jews from the immediate environs of the wall, the formation of this resonant physical space created a new kind of sonic proximity between those now using the space. Empty of fixed furniture apart from a wall marking off the lower prayer section, which is divided by a metal mechitza (divider) into men's and women's sections, the Western Wall plaza provides a flexible space for Jewish religious activity. On a few occasions during the year—such as the Priestly Blessing on the intermediate days of Passover and Sukkot, or the midnight *selichot* (penitential prayers) the night before Yom Kippur—the entire plaza functions as a single prayer space,. At these times, tens of thousands of worshippers listening to the voice of the *hazzan* (prayer leader) relayed over speakers, and enacting a shared sense of religious intention and practice. Most of the time, however, individuals and small groups circulate in the plaza and jostle for space at the wall, a constant polyphony of practices. Individual prayer is prominent: many vistors whisper prayers directly to the wall—or hold up mobile phones to the stones to enable an interlocutor to do so—reflecting the belief that the Divine Presence is directly manifested in this place.

A sound walk which I undertook on a weekday afternoon in February 2014 reveals a heterogeneous array of practices and discourses that simultaneously construct the Western Wall plaza as a pilgrimage site, a social space, a traditional synagogue, an outdoor space in which birds nest, a tourist experience, a work site and a national space, but are not reducible to any one of these paradigms. Forms of prayer officially

[8] Naomi Shemer, 1967, 'Yerushalayim shel Zahav', my translation; see Monk, 2005, 171 and Gavriely-Nuri 2007 for in depth discussion of this song and its symbolic role in these historic events.
[9] See also Reiter and Seligman, 2009, 251-2.

sanctioned by religious authorities coexist with divergent forms of devotion including folk practices believed to bring special merit; the prayers of temporary visitors and neighbouring Others are juxtaposed with an army ceremony enacting the hegemonic framework of the state:

> As I step out of the security booth into the upper part of the plaza, I notice an acoustic transformation in my surroundings. I am immediately aware of a hubbub of human voices—tourists, soldiers, religious Jews—which seem almost unnaturally proximate and resonant in the stone space, accompanied by the intermittent sounds of building works at the far end of the plaza.
>
> Descending to the women's side of the prayer section—the lower part of the plaza next to the Western Wall, divided physically from the rest of the plaza and delineated by a high mechitza (divider) into men's and women's sections—I hear a man's voice loudly intoning formal prayers on the other side of the mechitza. To my left an older, strictly Orthodox Jewish woman loudly tries in broken English to tell two young Spanish Jewish women that they should get married, become religious and move to Israel. She offers them a photocopied sheet of prayers, and another woman, this time American, takes over: 'I'll tell you what she was saying. She says you have to marry a Jewish boy….' Behind me, several tourists pose for photos, a row of four Israeli women sitting on plastic chairs hold an animated conversation about supermarket prices, and an American tourist, trying to take a photo through a gap in the mechitza addresses her friend: 'I don't get the whole separation thing...'
>
> At the wall itself, I am surprised at the prominence of the calls —cheeping and deep cooing—of the many birds perched in the crevasses of the wall above. Jostling for a space among the line of women next to the stones, I can still overhear the religious woman trying to persuade the young women, but I am also aware of the sounds of close human proximity: rustling clothing, the folding of paper notes to press between the stones. The woman to my right sits on a chair reciting psalms quietly, and to her right, a teenaged seminary girl weeps audibly, her face pressed into her prayer book. To my left, a Christian visitor flattens her hand against the wall, then crosses herself twice before she leaves.
>
> As I return to the upper plaza, a couple of hundred soldiers have arranged themselves in a large, neat three-sided formation around the central flagpole. This is a swearing-in ceremony for new soldiers joining the Givati infantry brigade. As the commanders prepare to begin the ceremony, a recording of a brassy military march plays over loudspeakers, briefly interweaving with the sound of the muezzin's call to prayer from the al-Aqsa mosque above. Sounds from the building site continue intermittently. A few minutes later, as I stand and watch from the alleyway above the plaza, individual companies of the brigade standing at different points in the square shout their allegiance in turn, their voices creating a stereophonic effect: 'Ani nishba! Ani nishba! Ani nishba!' (I swear! I swear! I swear!) The commander announces over the loudspeaker that each soldier will receive, along with his weapon, a Hebrew bible or Qur'an according to his beliefs, and the soldiers begin to file forward.[10]

[10] Fieldnotes, 5th February 2014. Video footage of the ceremony discussed here is archived at http://www.thekotel.org/today/Event.asp?PageId=&CatId=4&d=5&m=2&y=2014 (last accessed 16th February 2014).

Shared religious and national meanings at the Western Wall plaza emerge from this polyphony of voices. While the soundscape of the plaza constantly changes, as illustrated above, it is also not random. Employing the term 'sonic ecology', Rowland Atkinson suggests that 'urban sound, even its complexity, has a tendency for repetition and spatial order which, while not fixed, also displays a patterning and persistence, even as these constellations and overlapping ambient fields collide and fade in occasionally unpredictable, multiple or purposeful ways.' (2007, 1907) Likewise, in the case of the Western Wall plaza, this 'patterning and persistence' articulates Jewish and Israeli calendars of prayers, life-cycle events and ceremonies, both on a daily basis and following the yearly prayer cycle, inflected by the constant flow of different individuals and communities who gather there.

Within this temporal cycle, moments of convergence in the soundscape articulate shared intention. Suzy, an Orthodox American-Jewish immigrant, and her husband related to me how they walked down to the Western Wall from their home in the Jewish Quarter to pray at *netz* (sunrise) every morning, noting that although several *minyanim* (small prayer groups) regularly met at this time, a silence was palpable exactly at sunrise, as everyone consensually began the silent Amidah prayer at the same time –only disturbed sometimes by groups of visitors 'straight off the plane' who failed to fall silent at the relevant time.[11] By contrast, sometimes moments of convergence are expressed through heightened activity: Monday and Thursday mornings are busy with bar mitzvah celebrations, and on Friday evenings the plaza is packed with visitors welcoming the Sabbath: I watch secular Israeli teenage girls in tight trousers participating in a weekend of religious activities rub shoulders with large groups of diaspora Jewish teenagers visiting Israel part of organized tour programmes. The teenagers sang and danced in circles—Shabbat services, religious songs, or Israeli popular songs, depending on the group, while a substantial Breslov Hasidic minyan prayed at the front of the plaza near the wall, all observed by many curious non-Jewish tourists who come to watch the Shabbat celebrations.[12]

Larger events mark yearly prayer cycles: for the midnight *selichot* penitential prayers on the night before Yom Kippur, attended by prominent rabbinic figures, many thousands of Sephardic Jews from across the country stream to the plaza which fills crushing point; others look down the streets and rooftops above. Sound connects the participants, who are too numerous to be able to see to the edge of the crowd, into a single congregation: loudspeakers carry the voice of the hazzan—in recent years renowned paytan Moshe Habusha—over the full plaza, and those present participate loudly in the piyutim, singing for a last time the familiar melodies which are sung daily in the Sephardic liturgy from Rosh Hodesh Elul until Yom Kippur.

Other ceremonies reflect the coalescence of sacred and secular readings of the space. Among the more unusual events that I stumbled across at the wall was a ceremony, sponsored by the Society for the Protection of Nature and the Jerusalem Municipality, with participation from environmentalist and deputy mayor Naomi Tsur and Shmuel Rabinovitz, the rabbi of the Western Wall, to welcome the swifts back to the Western Wall for their yearly spring nesting season. Whirling round the plaza in flocks, the sound of the swifts (whose Hebrew name, 'sis,' imitates their call) is strikingly penetrating; pointing to a verse in Jeremiah in which these birds are mentioned, Tsur pointed out that these birds had been part of the Jerusalem landscape (and therefore soundscape) for thousands of years.

[11] Interview with the author, 28 November 2009.
[12] Fieldnotes, 14th February 2014.


'The Jerusalem municipality welcomes the swifts on their return to the Western Wall.' 15th March, 2010. Photograph: The author.

The recurring rhythms produced by the layering of multiple events such as these serve to articulate a collective sense of placehood at the Western Wall, linking very different events and protagonists into a shared articulation of a Jewish-Israeli calendar. Nevertheless, the open, resonant plaza and heterophonic nature of the soundscape simultaneously allow dissenting voices to emerge. In *The Political Life of Sensation*, Davide Panagia compellingly argues that the politics of voice in the public sphere transcend conventional questions of meaning, or 'making sense' of utterances. (2009,

61) A word, he notes, is both sound and sense; 'though a political utterance may be retroactively tuned to sound like a reasonable expression of interests, its first pitch is an interruptive noise.' (ibid, 48-9). The following three case studies explore three such interruptive noises, exploring how sounds in and around the Western Wall plaza re-articulate the plaza as a space of ideological contestation, contributing to wider debates about freedom of religious expression in public spaces in the state of Israel, the wider physical and symbolic context of the Western Wall, and the frayed limits of Israeli control over east Jerusalem.

**Negotiating religious space at the Western Wall: Women of the Wall**

The most prominent ideological contestation at the Western Wall in recent years has concerned religious authority, amid ongoing campaigns for the recognition of non-Orthodox religious rights in Israel. Under the auspices of the state-appointed orthodox Rabbi of the Western Wall, the prayer plaza reflects the norms of an Orthodox synagogue: Torah scrolls are exclusively used on the men's side, bookshelves hold traditional prayer books, and a cadre of religious personnel enforce women's modest dress.[13] Signs ask visitors to respect the holiness of the site, to dress modestly, and not to take photographs on Shabbat. Following traditional Jewish practice, men's prayer in the plaza tends to be formal and communal, gathering in *minyanim*; women almost exclusively pray individually, communal practices largely restricted to activities such as dividing the book of Psalms among a group of women in order to complete reading the whole book in one session.

In recent years, the most prominent challenge to Orthodox religious hegemony in shaping religious practices at the Western Wall has been mounted by 'Women of the Wall', a women's prayer group seeking since 1998 to pray as a group, read from a Torah scroll and to permit those members who desire to pray with tallit and tefillin at the Western Wall. The religious and legal struggles of this group have received sustained attention from the Israeli and Jewish press, in Jewish feminist circles, and by scholars. (Chesler and Haut, 2002; Charmé 2005) Throughout the group's twenty-five year history, and spanning a series of decisions by regional courts and the Supreme Court, its members have continued to meet every month at the Western Wall, normally praying within the women's section and then reading Torah at the Robinson's Arch egalitarian prayer area, according to police directives.[14]

Sound has repeatedly been referenced during this contestation. Both supporters and detractors of the group have linked the Women of the Wall's practice of singing certain portions of the prayers to models in wider Jewish thought. For some of the women, song is a direct way to connect to the redemptive model of Miriam, who sang with the women during the Biblical account of the Exodus. (Exodus 15: 20-21; Haberman 1997) Conversely, strictly Orthodox opponents of the group have raised the halachic issue *kol b'isha ervah*, referring to a Rabbinic prohibition for men to hear the singing voices of women during prayer.[15] During the prayers themselves, sound has frequently served as a direct arena of contestation, the singing voices of the women juxtaposed with male (and female) opponents shouting insults, and by pointedly loud male prayer services on the other side of the mechitza; typically, harmonies sung with Western vocal production by the Women of the Wall are counterposed with the unharmonized heterophony of

[13] The enforcement of Orthodox prayer norms at the Western Wall has been the matter of ongoing debate in Israeli society as well as various court cases: see discussion of 'Women of the Wall,' below.
[14] A prayer area in a neighbouring archaeological park, next to an adjacent stretch of the same wall, established by an Israeli government commission in 1998 to serve as a location for egalitarian Conservative and Reform prayer services at the Western Wall. (Charmé 2005, 31) This site was expanded in 2013.
[15] See http://womenofthewall.org.il/about/history/timeline/. The topic of *kol b'isha ervah* has been rehearsed in many recent halachic (both progressive and conservative) and sociological discussions.

simultaneous male prayer services and hoarse, shouting voices of male and female protestors.[16]

During a brief period in 2013, however, sound assumed a more instrumental role in the contestation between Women of the Wall and their detractors. Following a ruling in May 2013 by the Jerusalem District Court that it was indeed permissible for women to pray with prayer shawls and *tefillin* at the Western Wall, a harsh war of words erupted between the Women of the Wall and religiously conservative factions, including a newly created opposing group, 'Women for the Wall'. On July 8th 2013, Rosh Hodesh Av, the opposition came to a head. Ahead of the Women of the Wall's scheduled service, the opposing group, together with political allies, brought thousands of women and teenaged seminary girls to the Western Wall, completely filling the women's prayer area; in response the police moved the Women of the Wall to a cordoned-off area at the back of the upper plaza. Here, the opposition to the women's prayer moved from verbal contestation—whether via legal work or via shouted insults—to sheer noise. A large number of strictly Orthodox men and women used shrill plastic whistles to try to drown out the sound of the Women of the Wall's prayer; meanwhile, loudspeakers were installed in the men's prayer section for a prayer service led by the official rabbi of the Western Wall, marking a significant change from the usual unamplified prayer in independent minyanim, and effectively drowning out the womens' prayer. The womens' prayer continued as usual, ending with an emotional rendition of Hatikvah, Israel's national anthem.

These protests were widely covered by Israeli and international media, which was largely sympathetic to Women of the Wall, framing these events within larger debates, both local and global, about religious fundamentalism and modernity. Mirroring the acoustic dimensions of the conflict, sound—implied in photographs—assumed a prominent role in the visual language of the media coverage. Whereas in previous years, press photographs had focused particularly on religious practices (women reading Torah or praying with tallit and tefillin) and on police arrests of various members of the group, several widely circulated photographs in 2013 transposed the sounds of the conflict into visual form. In one memorable image, a member of Women of the Wall in dungarees and short sleeves, her mouth closed and her face relaxed, reaches out to embrace a strictly Orthodox woman whose face is contorted and mouth wide open in a shouting gesture, a book of psalms in her hand. In a second image, a blonde girl in a blue t-shirt smiles at a young yeshiva student who appears to be shouting and gesticulating at her. A photograph of the strictly Orthodox women who flooded the plaza shows a woman wearing a turban facing the camera, metal whistles in her mouth and that of a teenaged girl standing beside her, and a camera in the hand of the third pointing at the viewer.

While the ebb in the conflict between Women of the Wall and their detractors subsided during the following months, these images—and the sounds that accompanied them—stand as a powerful intervention into the struggle between the Women of the Wall and their detractors, at least temporarily reframing it from a conflict about specific religious practices with norms enforced by the Israeli police and challenged in the court system, to a more global contestation of voice played out in the brute, interruptive rhetoric of acoustic volume and popular protest.

**Contesting nationalist narratives: Sivuv Shearim and Rikudgalim**

[16] Fieldnotes and recording of morning Women of the Wall service, 11th August 2010.

A different contestation of ideological space is embodied by participants in the monthly 'Sivuv Shearim' (Circling the Gates) ritual, which has taken place on the eve of Rosh Hodesh most months since 2000. Identified by its organizers as the renewal of a ceremony documented in the Cairo Genizah, it is presented as an outlet for Jewish hopes for the building of the Third Temple.[17] Beginning from the Western Wall plaza, the group circles the Temple Mount via streets inside and outside the Old City, stopping at each of the historical gates to recite psalms connected with the Levites of the biblical Temple. Like the Women of the Wall, the organizers of Sivuv Shearim see themselves as representative of a broader public: 'Sivuv Shearim is not an event that belongs to a small group, but is undertaken as emissary of the whole of the Jewish people.'[18]

While the organizers of the Sivuv Shearim place emphasis on the antiquity of the ritual, its form and the musical elements employed are new ones. Unusually for a Jewish religious ceremony, the Sivuv Shearim uses recorded music and amplification, combining Sephardi and Ashkenazi elements. Participants, most of them teenage members of religious youth movements, push pram bases with loudspeakers precariously attached. When the group stops near each gates, the speakers convey the leader reciting psalms to a Sephardic nusach. The rest of the time, they play loud religious popular music connected to Jerusalem or relevant religious holidays.[19] The group is gender segregated—men first, followed by women, the front row of whom hold up a curtain which serves as a portable mechitza. The group moves through seemingly empty streets: all businesses are closed by this time in the evening, and a mobile framework of police roadblocks prevent Palestinians from passing along the streets while the Sivuv passes.

Intertwined with the widely-articulated religious goal of connecting to the Temple is a religious-nationalist narrative that seeks to expand current Jewish spaces in predominantly Palestinian parts of the Old City, which resonates with broader Jewish nationalist and settlement movements active in the Old City. An article on 'HaKol HaYehudi'—'The Jewish Voice', a news site set up in 2005 to protest Israel's disengagement from Gaza—protests the police's decision to cancel that month's Sivuv Shearim because of Ramadan, quoting (anonymously) one of the organizers: 'The police tries to prevent Jewish presence in the Old City, but we will not give up, and will continue to circulate [ed. 'lehistovev' – referring also to 'Sivuv'] here freely. The police cancelled one 'Sivuv Shearim' and got two [impromptu rituals].'[20] Within this framework, music forms a means, at least temporarily, for the group to achieve its political goals.

Within the carnivalesque atmosphere created by recorded music, singing and tambourines, music serves as a vehicle for the fusion of religious and political ideology. Songs from the popular neo-Hasidic religious repertory (including Shlomo Carlebach's 'Am yisrael chai' ('The People of Israel Live') and 'Yibane hamikdash' ('Rebuild the Sanctuary') segue into 'Am haNetzach Lo Mefached' (The eternal people are not afraid, a text set to a Breslov Hasidic melody and associated with protests against the 2005

[17] Another modern ritual drawing upon the same roots, which preceded the one discussed here, is the circling of the gates of the Old City on the eve of Tisha b'Av. This ritual and the Geniza sources are detailed here: http://www.thekotel.org/newsletter/article.asp?Id=55 (last accessed 16th February 2014)

[18] Ofer Kapach, May 2008, on site http://binyamin.org.il/?CategoryID=553&ArticleID=1138 (last accessed 16th February 2014, translation mine).

[19] In accordance with religious prohibitions, no recorded music is used on Rosh Hodesh Av.

[20] This comment originally appeared in an article entitled 'Hamishtara bitlah sivuv she'arim echad' ['The police cancelled one Sivuv Shearim'] on the website www.hakolhayehudi.co.il (last accessed February 16, 2014). This article has since disappeared, but the comment translated here, now attributed to a 'participant' in the sivuv is reproduced on this forum: http://www.hydepark.co.il/topic.asp?whichpage=14&topic_id=2791798&forum_id=21099 (accessed February 23, 2015).

Sivuv Shearim participants and loudspeakers on El Wad/Hagay Street, 16 December 2009. Photograph: The author.

Israeli disengagement from Gaza) and 'Zochreini Na' ('Remember me'), a 'Biblical song of revenge' by Dov Shurin recorded during the Second Intifada (2002). To a fast melody and heavy rock beat, Shurin sets Judges 16:28, a verse in which Samson calls for God's revenge on the Philistines. Shurin's setting clearly replaces the Biblical 'p'lishtim' (Philistines) with 'palastin' (Palestine), a replacement followed by participants in the Sivuv.[21]

This fusion of nationalist ideology and religious repertories sung while moving through the Old City streets recalls the annual 'Rikudgalim' ('Flag-dance') through Jerusalem, held on 'Yom Yerushalayim' (Jerusalem Day—the anniversary of the reunification of Jerusalem under Israeli control in 1967). Much larger than the Sivuv Shearim, the Rikudgalim is attended by thousands, primarily secular-nationalist and religious-nationalist teenagers, who stream through the main streets of the Old City, cordoned off by the police, towards an ecstatic evening of live music, speeches and dancing at the Western Wall. In footage of the 2011 Rikudgalim passing through the Old City, neo-Hasidic songs with nationalist overtones are interleaved with explicitly racist football songs and chants associated with supporters of Beitar Jerusalem: 'Mohammed is dead'; 'Death to Arabs.'[22]

[21] Shurin's recording is available online here: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DbZbygwuqfI. (Last accessed 16th February 2014) Many recordings of the song are available on Youtube; a number of them return to the original Biblical text.
[22] For the latter, see http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JrWFg6S-Xas (Last accessed 16th February 2014) See Sermer, 2014 and Wood, 2013 for further discussion of singing as nationalist activity during Yom Yerushalayim in the Old City.

Beyond serving as a vehicle for ideology, however, in the Sivuv Shearim sound itself plays an instrumental role in reframing unfamiliar geographies, temporarily extending the consensual Jewish sound space of the Western Wall plaza to streets in the Muslim Quarter of the Old City. During the Sivuv, singing, recorded music and the loud jingling of specially-produced tambourines reverberate in the resonant, empty stone streets, literally amplifying the presence of the relatively small group of participants (tens or hundreds) taking part in the event.

Both the Sivuv Shearim and Rikudgalim rely on the Israeli political control of east Jerusalem in order to take place free of physical threats, physically articulating a narrative of united Jerusalem with security co-operation from the police, yet simultaneously undermine the reality of the united city by performing a heroics of conquest in contested space. Referring to Yom Yerushalayim celebrations, ethnomusicologist Tanya Sermer suggests that '[b]lasting music through loudspeakers at multiple stages and on moving vehicles, and marching and dancing with Israeli flags does not just celebrate Israel's military victory in 1967 and the annexation of East Jerusalem and the Old City, it in fact re-conquers that territory anew each year and unifies the city for the duration of the performance.' (2014, 3-4) If the participants in these marches thus place themselves in the role of the Israeli soldiers who liberated the Western Wall in 1967, at the same time they call the solidity of that liberation into question. The secure auditory space of the Western Wall plaza is frayed, and the wall is repositioned within a narrative which renders the 1967 victory as incomplete, waiting for a political resolution that would turn the whole Old City into Jewish space, and religious resolution in the building of the Third Temple.

**Frayed sonic space: The cantor and the muezzin**

A final interruption of sonic space in the Western Wall plaza arises in the juxtaposition Muslim voices, primarily the call to prayer from the al-Aqsa mosque, located almost directly above the Western Wall, with the everyday sounds of Jewish prayer. Since 1967, the Western Wall plaza has been, effectively, an exclusively Jewish space; the disputes between Jews and Muslims over physical space that characterized the space in the early twentieth century have been superseded by debates between Jewish groups about how the space should be configured and used. Photographs showing the close juxtaposition of the Dome of the Rock and the Western Wall are a frequently encountered visual icon representing the different faiths in the Holy Land, or (with barbed wire in the foreground) the Israel-Palestine conflict; yet visually, when standing at the wall itself, the Muslim buildings on the Haram al-Sharif/Temple Mount above are entirely hidden due to the near-vertical sight lines. Muslim landmarks are also generally hidden from the visual vocabulary of religious Jewish iconography, which frequently uses camera angles or crops to portray only the stone wall; occasionally, more provocatively, the mosques are blurred, removed or Judaized in visual art.

Sound, however, obeys no such boundaries. The sound of the call to prayer from the al-Aqsa mosque is a regular reminder of proximity and shared auditory space. Normally this sound, a regular facet of the Jerusalem soundscape, and obeying a predictable schedule, is not particularly remarkable, floating above the wider soundscape of the plaza. However, the changing soundscape of the Western Wall leads to the possibility of juxtapositions which reconfigure the meaning of this sonic proximity, highlighting the fragility of this Jewish sonic enclave at the fractured seamline of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

In the evening of Israel's memorial day for fallen soldiers in 2010, the Western Wall plaza was packed with people attending the state's official memorial ceremony.[23] For once only during the year, the prayer area had been cleared entirely of both furniture and people, and chairs for invited guests, a memorial torch, and a speaker's platform arranged in the upper plaza. Hundreds of other attendees stood at the back of the plaza, standing to attention as the memorial siren rang out. Following a series of speeches, the half-hour ceremony concluded with the memorial prayer 'El Male Rachamim' sung by the chief cantor of the IDF, followed by the national anthem, Hatikva.[24] During the prayer, sung unaccompanied in a rich vocal tone, a cloud of voices of the surrounding muezzins reciting the evening call to prayer began to sound alongside the cantor's voice, just distinguishable from its natural and amplified echo. As the cantor reached the final phrases of the prayer, sung in a combination of melodic modes centering on the pitches A and E; the voice of the muezzin of the al-Aqsa mosque rose in pitch above that of the cantor, overlapping his phrases and effectively creating a two-part counterpoint in a cognate C hijaz mode, hitting a high E as the cantor descended to C and B, and undermining the final cadence of the prayer by continuing beyond it, with the musical effect of re-reading the final note of the prayer as a dissonance in a contrasting melodic mode. The muezzin's disembodied call continued as those present sang Hatikva, now juxtaposed as a fully dissonant musical mode. Since the sound feed for the live broadcast version of the event, broadcast on national television, was taken from a microphone external to the amplification system, this unintentional vocal counterpoint was audible to all watching the ceremony, an element noted by a number of online commentators on the popular Israeli news site Ynet.[25]

The reactions of these commentators indicate a profound unease with the politics of proximity revealed by this juxtaposition, which inserted an unexpected extra voice into a ceremony structured by an otherwise ordered progression of sounds: Siren. Silence. Bugle. Speeches. Kaddish. Memorial prayer (see Handelman, 1998, 204 for discussion). One commentator heard the amplified voice as a deliberate provocation; a second understood the very fact of the juxtaposition as undermining state power, stating that the call to prayer should not have been allowed to sound during the ceremony. That the timing of the juxtaposition was not specific to the Western Wall plaza was mentioned by two commentators, both of whom from the north of Israel, who noted that muezzins in local Arab villages had also sung the call to prayer during the ceremony—a comment which simultaneously both normalized the juxtaposition, suggesting that it was indeed an unintentional meeting point in two calendars, but also extended the situation of unease to the whole nation-state: if memorial ceremonies, a core component of Israeli 'civil religion' (Liebman and Don-Yehiya, 1983) are not impenetrable by the Other, the integrity of the state itself is compromised.

Perhaps the first question asked in the online discussion was particularly salient, however: the poster simply expressed confusion whether he had actually heard the voice of the muezzin, seeking confirmation from other readers. If the juxtaposition of the voices during the ceremony was unexpected, in sonic terms another element was also potentially unnerving: the similarity of the voices, which made it difficult to pick out the sound of the muezzin from the resonance of the cantor's voice. Both were unaccompanied but amplified male voices, chanting religious texts to modes characterized by prominent use of an augmented second interval. At the same time, then, as the sonic leakage brought the Muslim voice into the soundscape of the Jewish ceremony, sonically the voices also merged together, acoustically eliding the

[23] A similar ceremony is discussed in detail by Don Handelman, 1998, ch. 9.
[24] Video footage of the full ceremony is archived online at http://www.thekotel.org/today/gallery6.asp?CatId=4&d=18&m=4&y=2010, last accessed 9 February 2014
[25] http://www.ynet.co.il/articles/0,7340,L-3877808,00.html, last accessed 9 February 2014

unintentionally juxtaposed voices into a shared texture in which it was difficult for this listener to separate between 'self' and 'other'.

## Conclusion

'It's hard to get a connection there – too much interference,' admitted a strictly Orthodox woman to whom I was chatting about the Western Wall while preparing this article. If, as I suggested at the beginning of this article, the stones of the wall are a visual icon of a remarkably consensual Jewish space, sound complicates this space. As political scientist Davide Panagia suggests, listening to public spaces offers a shift in analytical paradigm: one focused less on 'the anchoring of the past' (2009, 52) through clean, coherent narratives than on invoking the subjunctive mood, parsing dynamic spaces in which competing voices and ideologies sometimes speak to each other, sometimes speak across each other and sometimes simply exist in the same space. The changing soundscape of the Western Wall plaza emphasizes the dynamic process of contesting discourses and identities over fixed narratives, emphasizing the embodied interaction between physical space and the politics of presence.

This reading speaks more widely to the way in which conflicted spaces in Jerusalem might be parsed. Interruptive noises articulate the politics of public spaces in general, and particularly articulate the seams of conflicted space, challenging conventional sociological readings of space. In their introduction to their book 'To Rule Jerusalem', Roger Friedland and Richard Hecht note that the symbolic resonances of Jerusalem's spaces tend to reinforce divisions between the city's constituent communities:

> In other cities, citizens share a bedrock of belief; the metropolis is a more mundane and private landscape. […] But in Jerusalem, there is little common reality upon which citizens can stand and adjudicate their differences. Ordinary lives are suffused with extraordinary significance, radiating the power of collective purposes, irreconcilable and endlessly in conflict. The city is not just a profane backdrop to the daily round, a public instrument for the pursuit of private happiness. It is a symbol of each community's collective identity (3).

Friedland and Hecht emphasise the separateness of Jerusalem's communities, who 'all strive to insulate themselves from those who live differently' (1). Yet in framing diverse spaces, the Western Wall plaza highlights the heterogeneity of those who 'live differently' even within a single religious community, allowing space for individual practices, and challenges those who visit it to be in a heterophonic space, where nobody's sound space—not even that of the state—is immune from involuntary juxtaposition with the sound of Others. Despite the strength of the narratives which cement the importance of the Western Wall as a religious and historic site, it is perhaps this flexibility which points to the unusual ability of this site both to contain the most hegemonic narratives of Jewish and Israeli culture and yet also to serve as a space where these narratives are constantly challenged.

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