

1 *Introduction: A Tourist at Home*

This book examines the work of three different women's movements – two Jewish Israeli and one Muslim Palestinian – in and around Jerusalem's Temple Mount/al-Haram al-Sharif and the Western Wall. While my research entailed participating in and observing some of the groups' activities, this book is not an ethnography in a traditional sense. The time I spent in the city as a researcher for this project was limited to one-month and two-month visits; the summers of 2015 and 2016 as well as December 2015. I accompanied women activists to the sites where their efforts were focused, and some to their homes.¹ Alongside conversations with activists and observations, I collected materials from the groups – mainly religious texts used in ritual and in teaching, and advocacy materials. I reviewed a large number of videos put up by the groups as well as their online publications. I collected media coverage and court rulings covering the three movements. There were important and immediate power differentials in our relations and among the different movements. Several of the Palestinian women activists I spoke with were banned from entering the Temple Mount/al-Haram al-Sharif premises, their movement had been declared illegal, and they could not undertake their religious and religious-political activities at the sacred site. The Jewish women's movements I studied faced other very real challenges, but none as extensive as those that Palestinian activists experienced.

Even though my time in the city was limited, Jerusalem and its complicated realities are part of my biography – I grew up in satellite localities for which the city was the urban center (Tzora, Beit Shemesh). I went to middle school and high school in the city, my father was born and raised there, my grandparents lived there, and my parents finally returned some years ago, living in the house where my father grew up. But Jerusalem's sacred sites were completely absent from my personal experience of the city. When I was in school in the 1990s, spending most of my days in Jerusalem, I never went to the Old City. I did not

have much interest in those parts, and I think my parents discouraged it, both for political reasons – they tried to avoid going into occupied territories – and for safety reasons – staying away from stone throwing or stabbing or fiery protest, or whatever occupied people resorted to in order not to be completely unseen and forgotten. The only Jerusalem I knew was the unabashedly secular one. I went to movies and malls, I hung out with my friends at the McDonald's at the city center after school, we walked up and down the dirty alleyways that smelled of urine between Kikar Zion (Zion Square) and Kikar HaKhatulot (Cats' Square) on Friday nights. To me Jerusalem always felt dirty, poor, and depressing, and made me want to leave.

For my father, however, as for many others, Jerusalem meant much more. I asked him about the city when working on this book, and he said that he saw himself as part of the city's landscape. His biography was so entwined with it that he felt part of Jerusalem and that Jerusalem was a part of him. While it was not at all a religious connection, to him the city nevertheless was personally special and important. For this book, I tried to see in Jerusalem what he saw and what so many others see; I tried to experience the Jerusalem of my interlocutors as they do, but I always fell short. I always felt foreign, and as I started to walk through the Old City and spend time in its sacred sites, I felt like a tourist. Interestingly, others in the city – Israeli Jews, Muslim and Christian Palestinians – usually assumed I was a tourist, speaking to me in English or trying to guess where I was from until I explained that I was from here.

Just as I never saw sacredness growing up, I also hardly ever saw Palestinians in Jerusalem. Life was so segregated that my school had no Arab students, and there were rarely opportunities to meet Palestinian Jerusalemites my age. A girlfriend of mine who worked at a supermarket briefly dated an Arab co-worker, but there was no question of making the relationship serious or long term; that wasn't even contemplated. It was only when I left to study abroad that I met Palestinians and made friends, and when I returned for research I got to know Palestinians in the city through my work. But the city remains as socially segregated as it was when I was growing up. Even though Palestinians make up almost 40 percent of the city's residents, outside the public spaces of hospitals, higher education institutions, and shopping areas, the few Jewish and Palestinian Jerusalemites who may want to meet and socialize have to intentionally create opportunities and

shared spaces. Despite Israel's relentless proclamations of a "unified Jerusalem," the city remains divided by design. Palestinian residents do not enjoy equal civil rights: they are non-citizens; their schools are underfunded; their neighborhoods are underserved; they are over-policed and dealt with as a security problem; they do not receive adequate building permits and their houses often face demolition orders; their residency is under constant threat of being stripped away; and they are evicted from their homes to make room for Jewish settlers.²

As a Jewish Israeli, when I walk in the Old City or travel through East Jerusalem I am a part of this reality, no matter how much I feel like a tourist. My religion and nationality give me the privilege to go almost anywhere, to move unencumbered by the police or soldiers through contested spaces, to pursue this research in a way that a Palestinian from Jerusalem would find much more difficult. I am able to speak with radical right-wing settlers in a way that a Palestinian scholar may not be, and I am able to speak with Palestinian Murabitat – women activists for al-Aqsa – whose phones, Facebook accounts, and emails are monitored by the security services, without the risk of being suspected a "terrorist" by those who surveil them. Though I might feel like an outsider, a visitor looking in with a great deal of bewilderment at the attachments and struggles of Muslims and Jews, Palestinians and Israelis over the sacred sites of Jerusalem, I always benefit from the status of being, by accident of birth, a member of the occupying rather than the occupied collectivity.

That is inescapable when I pursue my research in Jerusalem and in Israel/Palestine. But in this respect, being a tourist at home made me conduct myself as a visitor would. Instead of comfortable familiarity I continually felt discomfort, never felt at home or as if I belonged, or had any claim to the space. This hardly mitigated the enormous imbalance of access and privilege between myself and others. It is also not to say that Israeli Jews have no claims here or that this cannot be their home. It is simply to say that in the current condition of occupation and denial of equal civil rights in the city and in Israel/Palestine at large, in the permanent limbo of a so-called temporary occupation, there is scarcely a way of being non-complicit with the structures of inequality.³ Experiencing this field as a tourist, or as a provisionally invited visitor – since "tourist" also conjures a fraught relationship – helped me, at least, not feel at home.

Later, while finishing up writing this book, I read an essay by Edward Said in which he quotes a twelfth-century monk from Saxony named Hugo of St. Victor in reference to one's relationship to place, and particularly to "home" or "homeland." The quotation reads:

The man who finds his homeland sweet is still a tender beginner; he to whom every soil is as his native one is already strong; but he is perfect to whom the entire world is as a foreign land. The tender soul has fixed his love on one spot in the world; the strong man has extended his love to all places; the perfect man has extinguished his.⁴

On the one hand, these lines can imply that my lack of attachment to Jerusalem is a methodological advantage, and perhaps even an ethical stance. Yet on the other, invoking them also seems problematic because they entail a hierarchy in which detachment is better than attachment; in which my perspective is somehow preferable to those of my interlocutors, who are so connected to a place that some of them may be willing to even give their lives for it if that became necessary. I want to acknowledge this tension that perhaps still pervades this book. The shifts and (im)balances between my perspective and those of my interlocutors reflect my distance and inability to fully comprehend the sentiments that motivate them; they reflect my status, in many aspects, as a tourist at home.

Introduction

In 1929, dubbed "Year Zero" of the Arab–Israeli conflict,⁵ violence between the Arab population of Mandatory Palestine and Jewish residents and immigrants swept the land. In Jerusalem, the catalyst for tensions around the Western Wall area was the installation of a screen beside the Wall to separate Jewish male and female worshipers, which the Jewish community had repeatedly attempted since the turn of the century.⁶ Historians writing about these events have observed that attempts to install a screen, meant on the face of it simply to separate Jewish women from Jewish men in prayer in accordance with a particular Orthodox practice, implicitly conveyed (whether intentionally or not), and indeed were perceived by the Arabs, as an attempt to assert control and dominance over the shared, and contested, Jewish–Muslim space.⁷ Regardless of actual political sovereignty, which at the time was in the hands of the British Mandate, both parties

to the contestation seemed to have assumed that the group that gets to dictate the gendered division of space would also be the group that gets to symbolically claim ownership of that space.

Today gendered separation at the site of the Western Wall (Kotel in Hebrew) is at the heart of another conflict. Jewish women of Orthodox, Conservative, Reform, and secular streams, organized under the title of Women of the Wall (WOW, or *Neshot HaKotel* in Hebrew), have since 1988 been contesting the limitation on what women are allowed to do at the area to which they are confined. They demand to read from a Torah scroll and lead public prayer, and have over the years been repeatedly arrested by the police and criticized by the Orthodox administration of the site. Their liberal feminist struggle, which is putatively about religious freedom, gender equality, and access, however, is completely silent on the fact that the site is also sacred to Muslims, that the plaza before the Wall was constructed through the 1967 expropriation and demolishing of the Muslim Magharib neighborhood that stood at the place, and that Muslim Palestinians are denied the right to access and worship freely at the site, which they call *al-Buraq Wall*.⁸ Other women espousing more conservative Jewish or Muslim religious politics take a vastly different approach to the feminism of Women of the Wall. Pious Palestinian Muslim women activists for *al-Aqsa*, called *Murabitat*, deny any claim by Jews to worship at any part of the Sacred Esplanade, from the Temple Mount/*al-Haram al-Sharif* area to the Western Wall. These are strictly Muslim religious sites, they argue, and Jewish religious claims to hold them sacred are a fraud. Women for the Temple, an Orthodox Jewish movement that seeks to hasten the rebuilding of the Jewish Temple on Temple Mount/*al-Haram al-Sharif* and engages in ascent⁹ to the site and in advocacy, expresses an ambivalent view of Women of the Wall. Some argue that though WOW's feminist challenge of certain Orthodox gendered traditions is misguided, WOW's emotional bond and connection to the holy site and their presence there help strengthen the "centrality" of the whole area of the Sacred Esplanade and the Old City of Jerusalem by raising Jewish consciousness about its importance. This aligns well, they believe, with the assertion of Jewish sovereignty in Jerusalem. Others, however, criticize not WOW's feminism but rather their focus on the Western Wall, which some Temple activists see as a space devoid of central religious significance in comparison to Temple Mount. They see the Western Wall as a synagogue like any

other and are dismayed by Jewish acquiescence to worship at the site in lieu of Temple Mount, which has been left for exclusive Muslim worship.

Even the brief description above gives a sense of the deep engagement of women in the contestation over sacred space in Jerusalem that has been central to the Israeli–Palestinian conflict, and of the layered gendered dynamics and debates over this space. Given this fact, it is surprising that so little discussion about the gendered nature of Jerusalem’s contested sacred space has been included in the voluminous literature on this topic. There are countless excellent books about Jerusalem and the interreligious conflict over the city’s sacred sites. None, however, has fully explored the evolving gendered debates on and women’s roles in the multilayered contestation around the Sacred Esplanade. Yet women have moved to the center stage of the Temple Mount/al-Haram al-Sharif conflict over the last two decades. The focus of this book is on the strategies devised and put into practice by women activists in their contestation of sacred space, and in particular the role that gender plays in this work. I examine how activists’ efforts within their intra-communal context have an effect, intended or not, in inter-communal contexts of the Israeli–Palestinian/Jewish–Muslim contestation.

This book trains our gaze on these developments and processes, drawing attention to the fact that, first, there has been little systematic investigation into the roles of Jewish women in Temple Mount activism. Even the excellent seminal work on Temple Mount zealots looks mainly at male actors.¹⁰ The same is true of Muslim activism for al-Aqsa, where little work has focused on the growing visibility of the Murabitat or the evolving role that the deployment of gender has played in Muslim contestation over the site.¹¹ The feminist Women of the Wall has received more attention in scholarly articles, and at least two books in English have been written solely about the group, as well as one in Hebrew.¹² These books and the academic literature more broadly, however, have not squarely placed WOW within the context of the inter-communal conflict. The literature often centers more on the formal political–legal aspects of WOW’s struggle rather than employing a critical feminist lens. The coverage has mainly focused on intra-Jewish debates. Indeed, feminist scholars have written quite extensively about the gender politics of intra-Jewish contestations of restrictive Orthodox practices that feminist activists such as WOW have been

waging.¹³ But while many of these studies are superb, they suffer from an understandable blind spot. Being sympathetic to feminist politics, they tend to privilege feminist initiatives and overlook non-feminist and even anti-feminist activism by Orthodox women in this context.¹⁴ Furthermore, the preoccupation with one form of access – that of Jewish women to their place of worship – does not acknowledge the issue of intersectionality,¹⁵ where the interests and struggles of one group of feminist women (Jewish women) is made possible only via the exclusion of other women, and men (Muslim Palestinians), from this same place.

The scant attention to these multilayered gendered dynamics in the inter-communal conflict in Jerusalem is surprising for two reasons. First, contested sacred sites are almost universally gendered. Their sacredness is often entangled in a gendered division of roles, practices, bodily presentations, and space. The contours and makeup of such divisions are not universal, but their various permutations, including those that seek to break down strict gender roles and practices, are inherently gendered. As Doreen Massey explains, when we think of space we must bear in mind that “particular ways of thinking about space and place are tied up with, both directly and indirectly, particular social constructions of gender.”¹⁶ Second, the discourse and practice of all the political and religious actors involved in contestation are, again, highly gendered. To paraphrase Verta Taylor, whether or not women actually participate in such contestations – and they often do – “gender dualist metaphors supply the cultural symbols” that all actors in these conflicts “use to identify their commonalities, draw boundaries between themselves and their opponents, and legitimate and motivate collective action.”¹⁷

This book, then, explores three contemporary women’s movements in and around Jerusalem’s Sacred Esplanade: Women for the Temple, a messianic Jewish Orthodox women’s movement for access to Temple Mount/al-Haram al-Sharif; Murabitat, pious Muslim women activists for the defense of al-Aqsa Mosque from Jewish claims; and Women of the Wall (WOW), a Jewish feminist organization mobilized against restrictive gender regulations at the Western Wall. Using these cases, the book demonstrates how attention to gender and to women’s engagement in conflict over central sacred places is essential for understanding the intra-communal processes that make contested sacred sites appear increasingly

“indivisible” for parties in the inter-communal context. More broadly, the book argues that a gender analysis of contested sacred places enriches and sharpens both our description of the “choreographies” of such sites and our analytical understanding of the contemporary dynamics of conflict in these sites; in particular the processes that give rise to the problem of “indivisibility.”

Situating the Argument: The Site and the Literature

Jerusalem’s “Sacred Esplanade”¹⁸ has been a constant feature in the conflict between Israelis and Palestinians, witnessing ebbs and flows in tensions around it. Perhaps more than any other contested sacred place, this site, which encompasses the Temple Mount/al-Haram al-Sharif and its surroundings including the Western Wall, has inspired inexhaustible academic and popular fascination. The site has served as a central case for studying the spatial dimensions of the interactions between religion and politics largely because of its religious significance to Judaism, Christianity, and Islam.¹⁹ The Temple Mount is considered Judaism’s holiest site. According to Jewish tradition, it is the site where Abraham bound his son Isaac for sacrifice, and it is believed to be the site of the First and Second Jewish Temples. For Muslims, after Mecca and Medina, Jerusalem and Temple Mount or al-Haram al-Sharif/al-Aqsa is the third-holiest place in Islam. It has been associated with the site of the Temple of Solomon in Muslim traditions, and Jerusalem was, before Mecca, the first direction for Muslim prayer. The site is where according to tradition Muhammad arrived on his night journey from Mecca and from which he ascended to heaven to meet with the prophets who came before him. It has served as a Muslim holy place and a mosque from the seventh century, when Muslims first captured the city, until the present (with an interruption during the Crusades). Below the Mount stands the Western Wall. Since at least the sixteenth century, when the Ottoman rulers of the Holy Land cleared up and designated a part of the supporting wall buttressing the Haram al-Sharif/Temple Mount for Jewish prayer, the Western Wall has been a center for Jewish religious ritual. Over the centuries it has been the place where Jews have prayed, considering it to be the closest place to the site of their destroyed Temple. Muslim traditions also consider the Western Wall to be holy, and identify it with the site where the prophet tied

al-Buraq, the winged creature that carried him from Mecca to Jerusalem.

In modern history, the space has changed hands from the Ottomans, to the British Mandate, to Jordan, to Israel. In the 1967 Six Day War Israel conquered East Jerusalem and the Old City of Jerusalem, as well as the West Bank, from Jordan, which had controlled this territory since 1948. Israel eventually annexed Jerusalem but, reluctant to extend citizenship to the Palestinian Arab population of the city, granted them residence permits instead.²⁰ This means that they can live and work in Jerusalem, but they do not have certain basic civil rights such as the right to vote or be elected to the Israeli parliament. Because of the sensitivity of Temple Mount/al-Haram al-Sharif, Israel quickly handed back the management of the site to the Islamic Waqf (the Islamic endowment administration) and established the “status quo.”²¹ The Temple Mount/al-Haram al-Sharif area would be a de facto place of worship exclusively for Muslims, while Jews and others could visit as tourists. Below the Mount the Palestinian Magharib neighborhood was demolished and a plaza was constructed in its place next to the Western Wall area which became an exclusive site for Jewish collective worship. This modus-vivendi division was generally accepted by religious and political authorities on both sides. Israel’s Chief Rabbinate announced that according to longstanding Orthodox traditions it was halachically forbidden for Jews to ascend to and pray at Temple Mount. The administration of the Western Wall was given to ultra-Orthodox rabbis, who established permanent gender segregation at the Wall – a feature that did not exist before. Since the year 2000 and the outbreak of the al-Aqsa Intifada, tensions over the site have become central to the discourse of religious and political actors. The area has been one of the thorniest issues in the Israeli–Palestinian conflict and has had a revival of sorts with the increasingly religious language that has continued to dominate the pronouncements of both parties to the conflict.

Contested sacred sites such as this one, over which different communities assert claims to exclusivity, draw our attention to the interaction between and imbrication of religion and politics in and over space. Religious Studies scholars, historians, geographers, anthropologists, sociologists, and political scientists have extensively theorized the ways in which space functions to produce new or renewed religious (and religious–political) identities in conflict and vice versa – the ways

such identity-processes transform the meaning and significance of space. Scholars have inquired how sites that are holy to different religious communities come to be seen as “indivisible” by these communities. They have offered extensive accounts of the processes and the actors that construct a sacred place as one that cannot and should not be shared, divided, or ceded. Yet the gendered dimensions of inter-communal disputes over sacred space in Jerusalem as well as in other holy places around the world, and women’s roles in these site-specific conflicts, have remained under-studied. An implicit, and at times explicit, association of women with peacefulness and tolerance in the political sphere and syncretic practices or more tolerant spirituality in the religious sphere has obscured the fact that women are often key actors in inter-communal contestation of holy places. Furthermore, even when women are not actively involved in contestation, gendered language, dynamics, and politics play a crucial role.

We can divide the current literature on shared or contested sacred places into two approaches. One is largely based in political science and strives for generalizable theory. The second is interdisciplinary, spanning the humanities and the social sciences, and is more descriptive, aiming to chart the “choreography” of shared/contested sacred sites.²² The latter, by its nature, includes greater attention to some gendered aspects of religious sites and to women’s religious practice, while the former often sidesteps it. In comparative politics, contestations over sacred sites have been examined through the prism of the problem of “indivisibility.” Integrating insight from economics and political science but adapting it to the unique nature of sacred sites, Ron Hassner offers the following three-part definition of indivisibility of holy sites: (a) “the [conflicting] parties must hold that the issue cannot be parceled out or subdivided without significantly diminishing its subjective value (coherence)”; (b) “the parties must mean the same thing when they refer to the issue they are bargaining over (boundaries)”; and (c) “the parties must believe that the issue cannot be substituted for or exchanged for something of equal value (uniqueness).”²³ This is a useful definition to apply to many sacred sites over which conflict between communities is ongoing.

Much of the literature in political science has attempted to investigate the reasons why certain goods come to be seen as indivisible. One strand of the literature has understood indivisibility as stemming from particular characteristics or histories of certain goods that

make them seem indivisible.²⁴ Jobani and Perez, for example, term the category of contested sacred spaces “thick sites.” A thick site, they explain, “is loaded with different and incompatible meanings that are attributed to it by different agents,” making it “highly significant” and therefore “irreplaceable.”²⁵ Another strand of the literature examines the processes by which political actors bargain over certain goods, with indivisibility being a consequence of the process rather than an innate attribute of the good.²⁶ While different, these two approaches nevertheless share a common feature. They conceive of processes of contestation as un-gendered and do not elaborate on the ways in which the deployment of gender and the participation of women play distinct and significant roles in shaping contestation.²⁷

The interdisciplinary literature, on the other hand, focuses on the choreographies of specific shared sacred sites. It addresses the dynamic dance, or evolving relationship, of various actors around these sites that run a fluid and changing spectrum between sharing, coexistence, toleration, antagonism, contestation, and conflict. Being more descriptive and grounded in the texture of cases, this literature is attuned to the ways in which specific sacred sites are experienced and constructed by a wide array of actors, elite and grassroots, and how politics, religion, and everyday life are enmeshed in such places. Barkan and Barkey, in their anthology *Choreographies of Shared Sacred Sites*, stress “the malleability of religious sites within the political discourse, and that it is the synthesis of daily life of sacred sites and high politics that constructs a choreography of these sites and determines whether it is conflictual or collaborative.”²⁸ The detailed ethnographies and histories of specific sacred sites in this tradition often acknowledge the gendered aspects of these spaces, whether in terms of these sites’ identity (who or what is worshiped) and visitors’ practices (who worships and in what way).²⁹ In particular, drawing on insight from feminist theory and feminist geography,³⁰ some of these studies have explored the gendered ways in which space is divided, inhabited, and interpreted, paying attention to public/private aspects of sacred space, embodiment, women’s compliance with and contestation of particular practices, and gendered symbols and meanings attached to these sites. A related set of writings has grappled with transformations in women’s access to religious spaces, authority, and texts, and their explicit or subtle contestation of existing gendered divisions in mosques,

synagogues, churches, and temples, as well as various clerical hierarchies or institutions of religious learning.³¹

However, this division of labor between the two sets of literatures – from political science on the one hand to an interdisciplinary angle on the other – has prevented insights on the gendered dynamics of sacred spaces from being included in theory building about inter-communal contestation of sacred places. The political science research focuses largely on male religious and political actors because of their clear visibility in public discourse and the academic literature. The interdisciplinary scholarship, when explicitly addressing both gender and women's practice, rarely examines how women participate in inter-communal conflict in sacred sites.³² These blind spots could leave one with a false impression that women's worship is in fact characterized more by syncretism, sharing, and coexistence among different groups and less by inter-communal contestation and religious–political conflict. In addition, the feminist commitment of much of this literature has focused its interest on women's adherence or resistance to, or negotiation of, patriarchal practices.³³ Its attention to intra-communal gendered contestations, however, has not been marshaled to shed light on inter-communal conflict. Drawing on the strengths of these two literatures and bringing their insights into closer conversation with each other around my research about the women's movements under study, I show how gendered processes link the intra-communal with the inter-communal. I also correct common misperceptions about women's religio-political activism and offer a new reading of the gendered production of sacred space.

Specifically, I show how women activists participate in the production of a particular sacred space – Temple Mount/al-Haram al-Sharif and the Western Wall – as one where (Jewish or Muslim) sovereignty cannot and should not be shared, divided, or ceded. I argue that women's activism and the symbolic deployment of gender more generally in this case operate in particular ways that work to transcend or overcome intra-community divisions and domesticate the holy. Women activists work to dismantle various intra-communal, largely Orthodox-motivated divisions: divisions between men and women through spatial segregation and role differentiation; various demographic divisions between women through ritual practice; divisions between private and public life; and, perhaps most importantly, divisions between the religious and the secular in emotional attachment

and preoccupation with the site. These efforts aim to elevate the centrality of the place in the consciousness of their wider communities, bringing in new constituencies that were formerly excluded from the site. This in turn, I argue, has the effect of making the contested sacred place increasingly indivisible in the inter-communal context, and thus the potential for ceding or dividing it, sharing control and possession over it, or even preserving its current “divided” status quo, increasingly more difficult.

The work of domestication furthers this effect of enhanced centrality by transforming the apparent nature of inter-communal contestation in the site. I borrow the concept of “the domestication of religion” coined by Susan Sered but place it within its religio-political context rather than simply examining its meaning in religious practice. Sered has looked at the ways in which women who profess their allegiance to a wider religious tradition personalize the rituals, institutions, symbols, and theology of that wider system in order to safeguard the well-being of particular individuals with whom they are linked in relationships of care. She argues that women “who have a great deal invested in interpersonal relationships, and who are excluded from formal power within an institutionalized religious framework, tend to be associated with a personally-oriented religious mode.”³⁴ What I argue is that this form of personalization, which Sered terms “domestication,” has a significant political effect in contested sacred sites. In the cases I study, women activists intentionally strive to transform the conflict over the site from one dominated by exclusive practices dictated by religious zealots to an arena that is also characterized by women’s intimacy, closeness to (as opposed to fearful distance from) the holy, everyday activity for children and families, personal moments and celebrations, unity, inclusion, and interpersonal bonds. By doing so, women activists transform the cause of the site from one championed solely by actors considered “extreme” or religious virtuosi to one that is increasingly “mainstream” and non-threatening; in other words, one that could be seen as domesticated rather than wild, unruly, and violent. In addition, instead of being simply the purview of zealots, activists use the liberal language of “religious freedom” and tolerance to describe their contestation of the space. However, and crucially, by moving the cause of the struggle over the site from a fringe or radical preoccupation to a mainstream attachment, from one that appears intolerant to one concerned with “religious freedom,” women activists

in fact contribute to the entrenchment of the conflict and strengthen the position that militates against division, egalitarian sharing, or ceding of control or sovereignty over the space. As we shall see, all three women's movements studied in this book contribute (some intentionally, others unintentionally) to rationalizing, expanding, normalizing and domesticating the agenda of Israeli expansionist occupation and ethnonationalist sovereignty in and over Jerusalem's sacred space.

The analysis of the interlinked processes here – overcoming intra-communal divisions and domesticating the holy – is developed inductively from the three cases of contemporary women's movements in Jerusalem. While the book offers these as potential building blocks for a contingently generalizable theory of the deployment of gender in contestations over sacred sites, the uniqueness of the Jerusalem case must be highlighted. Jerusalem may be different from other cases due to the unequal context of occupation. However, the mechanisms I elaborate in this book could be relevant to other contemporary conflicts with significant imbalance in access to power and resources by women of minority and majority groups. They could also be at play within historical cases involving colonial or settler-colonial contexts of vast power asymmetry between the parties to a contestation. This book provides a framework for a future research agenda that will interrogate comparatively and cross-nationally women's roles, and the variations in deployment of gender, in contestations over sacred sites.

Chapter Overviews

In the 1970s and 1980s, radical activists from the Jewish settler camp began to contest the post-1967 status quo at Temple Mount, in which it was a de facto place of worship exclusively for Muslims. Dismissing the rulings of Israel's Chief Rabbinate against Jewish ascent to the Mount, they argued for ascent and prayer at the site, and some even planned to attack and destroy the Dome of the Rock. Up until the 2000s these activists remained on the extreme fringes of Israeli society. In the twenty-first century, however, there has been a shift in Jewish Israeli public opinion on the question of ascent to and worship at the site. Some surveys now show that a majority of Israelis support Jewish ascent, and even the introduction of Jewish prayer at the site through various arrangements,³⁵ and visits by Israeli Jews to the site have increased markedly.³⁶ The issue of ascent and prayer has been taken

up not only by religious but also by secular politicians on the Israeli right, especially in the currently ruling Likud party.

The shift from fringe to mainstream has also been characterized by a shift in the emphases of the activists working on this issue and in their gendered discourse. Since 2000 the organization Women for the Temple, alongside other female activists, has worked to paint the struggle with the Palestinians over Temple Mount in softer and less threatening colors. Unlike the fanatics of the Jewish Underground, who wanted to blow up the Dome of the Rock,³⁷ these women say they want to ascend to the Mount ostensibly in the name of religious freedom, openness, and closeness to the divine. They say that they do not wish to provoke Muslims or the Israeli police, but simply to mark their wedding day, their daughter's bat mitzvah, or for personal prayer. They present their ascent as a negotiation between the unique experience of the holy and the mundane routine of life and weekly visits. The women speak of closeness, intimacy, and desire toward the holy that women are uniquely positioned to feel. In this way, they strive to domesticate the space as well as the debate around it, packaging it as less intimidating and explosive to the general Israeli public.

In the course of this process, they also reconfigure the space from one that is divided and separate in the Israeli imagination to one that is united and ultimately indivisible. Chapter 2, "Women for the Temple and the (In)Divisibility of Temple Mount," explores the themes taken up by Women for the Temple, such as the dismantling of spatial divisions (*mechitza*) between men and women by drawing on the gender egalitarian structure of the biblical Temple; the dismantling of role-division between men and women utilizing biblical and Talmudic sources on women's contribution to the building of the Tabernacle and the Temple; women's fight for egalitarian *mikveh* (ritual bath) access for unmarried women to facilitate Temple Mount ascents; and the activists' gendering of messianic post-Orthodoxy and its continuity with (as opposed to a break with) established settler religious-political practice.

Jewish Temple movements have often been described as constituting a break with mainstream settler strategies and priorities. However, by examining women's activism for the Temple and its gender politics I identify a continuation rather than a break with traditional settler modalities. The domestication of the military act of occupation of Palestinian territories since 1967 has been achieved through the

presence and activism of women in the settlements. Without women and children moving to the occupied territories, the settlements would have remained in the Israeli psyche as military outposts populated by soldiers and armed male civilians. Women make the settlement into a village, a site of normalcy and family life, an intimate, warm place whose civilian legitimacy is facilitated largely through their presence. This chapter demonstrates that the same strategy is now masterfully deployed in the cause of the Temple, generating a similar domesticating and mainstreaming effect.

Chapter 3, “Women of the Wall: Feminism between Intra- and Inter-Communal Contestation,” takes up the case of Women of the Wall (or WOW for short), who have been active in the Western Wall plaza since 1988. Encompassing Orthodox, Conservative, Reform, and even secular Jewish women, the group has struggled for women’s right to wear prayer shawls, pray, and read from the Torah collectively and out loud at the women’s section of the Western Wall. Such practices disrupt the restrictions imposed by the ultra-Orthodox administration of the site, which has argued that the women violate Israeli laws and regulations regarding holy places that require visitors to respect the “local custom” of the site. Alongside practicing collective prayer at the Wall, WOW has also engaged in a legal battle. Its activists have been repeatedly arrested over the years, and the group has filed petitions with the Israeli High Court of Justice to be granted permission for their practice. Their struggle has been over who is authorized to determine the “local custom” of the site. From a space shaped exclusively by ultra-Orthodox norms, WOW argues that it wants to make the Western Wall a place inclusive of all Jewish strands. Dismantling such intra-Jewish divisions, it constructs the site as a religious–nationalist symbol that should unite rather than divide Jews, as articulated in their mission statement, “The Western Wall is Judaism’s most sacred holy site and the principal symbol of Jewish people-hood and sovereignty.”

While the history of WOW is well documented, it is predominantly construed as an intra-Jewish feminist struggle, and has not been squarely placed within the context of the Israeli–Palestinian conflict and the workings of the Israeli occupation in East Jerusalem. As a progressive movement, WOW has nevertheless unintentionally contributed to a Jewish discourse that excludes Palestinians from conversation about the space it has contested. This chapter accompanies a tumultuous period of crisis in WOW that lays bare these fraught

dynamics. In 2016 some in the movement relinquished claims to intra-communal indivisibility and agreed to a government proposal to expand an alternative site on the southern section of the Western Wall (called Robinson's Arch) for Conservative and Reform egalitarian prayer, leaving the original sections of the Western Wall plaza to exclusive ultra-Orthodox practice. This move led to the establishment of the Original Women of the Wall, a group that rejects the alternative site as lacking the level of sacredness and historic meaning of the Western Wall. Following these developments, this chapter reveals how the contours of WOW's discourse and of such debates work – intentionally by some, unwittingly by others – to strengthen Jewish hegemony in Jerusalem. In the process of contesting divisions over gendered practice, WOW activists, including left-wing ones, sideline the contentious and divisive question of the Israeli occupation and the status of Jerusalem in WOW's activity and discourse, and some even agree to participate in the expansion of exclusionary Jewish ethnonationalist sovereignty in Jerusalem's sacred space.

Chapter 4 turns to the Palestinian context and the contestation of the site in a Muslim idiom. Since 1996 the Islamic Movement in Israel – the most popular Muslim religious movement in the country – has organized a tremendously successful popular mobilization campaign with the slogan “al-Aqsa is in Danger.” Decrying what it perceives as Israeli attempts to undermine the post-1967 status quo on Temple Mount/al-Haram al-Sharif, the movement has re-centered al-Aqsa Mosque as the central religious–nationalist symbol of the Palestinian struggle. In the process, it has tried to enlist the Palestinian community inside Israel, Jerusalem, and the occupied Palestinian territories as well as the Arab and Muslim worlds to the cause of its protection. Following the al-Aqsa Intifada (2000–2005), pious Muslim women have joined this campaign en masse, participating in the kind of public protest action that goes well beyond the traditional gendered division of labor advocated formally by the Islamic Movement. While I have written about this activism in earlier work,³⁸ Chapter 4, “Al-Aqsa will not be Divided! Murabitat Traveling to, Studying in, and Fighting for al-Aqsa,” also examines the more mundane side of women's activities for al-Aqsa to trace their strategies of the removal of intra-communal divisions and the domestication of the holy – which are in many ways similar to their deployment in the Jewish Israeli cases. These activities include organizing religious, educational, and recreational activities for women,

students, and children, celebrating personal occasions such as marriages, utilizing social media to articulate the bond between women and al-Aqsa, and other activities that enhance Muslim presence at the site and transform it from a distant, divided, and exclusive place of worship to one enmeshed in the everyday. The chapter follows in particular two initiatives in which women have been significantly active: group religious lessons at al-Aqsa; and organized shuttle buses for Muslim women from across the country to visit al-Aqsa. Through these projects, activists challenge and dismantle intra-communal divisions – between men and women’s roles and activities in both the secular and religious realms; between pious, traditional, elderly women and modern youth; between urban and rural; and between Palestinians from the West Bank and Jerusalem residents, and those who are citizens of Israel. By enlisting growing numbers of participants and occupying various spaces of al-Haram al-Sharif at various times, the activists strive to prevent spatial or temporal division of the site, which they fear is the plan of the Israeli government through the work of Temple activists.

In 2015 Israel’s defense minister issued a ban on the Murabitat – as the pious women activists for al-Aqsa have become known – declaring them and their male counterparts, the Murabitoun, illegal organizations. That November the Israeli government also outlawed the northern branch of the Islamic Movement, labeling its campaign in al-Aqsa as incitement to violence and racism. The fieldwork that led to this chapter involved following activists’ attempts to continue their work under these severe restrictions imposed by Israel. While the ban presents a limitation to the chapter’s ability to bring to life their activities at the site through direct observation, my interviews with women activists and review of the media coverage of their activism address this shortcoming by drawing on their descriptions of their work at the site.

As we shall see in the case-study chapters, a significant part of the work of domestication by the groups under study in this book invokes the language of religious freedom. Remarkably, and despite their differences, all three women’s movements frame their causes as falling under the purview of the right to religious liberty. Using secular liberal arguments alongside religious ones, they seek to change their wider publics’ perceptions of their struggle and the importance of the site they contest. They construct the space as a site of the state’s failure to respect

the basic liberal right to religious freedom rather than one of preoccupation for religious zealots with extreme or radical political agendas. Women of the Wall ask to pray at the Western Wall plaza according to their manner of prayer, in the name of establishing religious equality for Jewish women and non-Orthodox Jewish streams in the face of ultra-Orthodox exclusionary and monopolistic practices at the Kotel. Women for the Temple demand the right for Jews to pray at their holiest site, the Temple Mount, in the name of religious freedom and religious equality with Muslims, who are currently allowed to worship at the site exclusively. The Palestinian Muslim Murabitat, who have faced extensive arrests, repeated and prolonged bans from the site of al-Haram al-Sharif, and were eventually outlawed entirely in 2015, argue that such practices by the police and the Israeli government violate their religious freedom to practice the religious duty of *ribat* – the steadfast maintenance of a presence in al-Aqsa and the defense of Islamic holy sites from belligerent intruders. Tracing the various arguments from religious freedom that the groups articulate, Chapter 5, “Epilogue: The Question of Religious Freedom,” contributes to the growing critical engagement with the political lives of the idea of religious freedom and its effects.³⁹ As I show, in all three cases this powerful ideal is used, intentionally by some, unintentionally by others, not just to advance civil equality, but rather to expand discriminatory state sovereignty that grants and denies rights based on religious affiliation. As I will show, in all three cases the effect of upholding the mantle of religious freedom is to strengthen and entrench Jewish ethnonationalist sovereignty in the sacred site and to increasingly undermine Palestinian claims and presence.

Whether by design or not, each group’s engagement with the discourse of religious freedom works in the service of Israel’s assertion of its sovereignty and its powers at the contested sacred site. This is not unique to this context. As Saba Mahmood observes, very often “the principle of religious equality, when the provenance of the state, is subject to majoritarian norms and sensibilities.”⁴⁰ As a feminist inquiry, then, this book also considers alternatives to the logic of religious freedom as part of a commitment to egalitarian liberal democracy. My goal is not only descriptive but also prescriptive, to the extent that my feminist politics make me partial to the idea of civil and political equality in Jerusalem and in Israel/Palestine more broadly. I ask, following Mahmood, “How can we expect the modern state to

ameliorate religious inequality when . . . its institutions and practices hierarchize religious differences, enshrine majoritarian religious and cultural norms in the nation's identity and laws, and allow for religious inequalities to flourish in society while proclaiming them to be apolitical?" Where might we find "the resources for a critical practice that does not privilege the agency of the state? What kind of productive relations might such a critical practice open up between religious majorities and minorities, and between the state and its religious subjects?"⁴¹ These thoughts on alternatives to the discourse of religious freedom, which this book offers alongside its exploration of the three women's movements, are meant both for readers and, possibly, for activists in the movements themselves, to the extent that some of them may be committed to a future of political and civil equality in the sacred site, in Jerusalem, in Israel/Palestine, and elsewhere as well.

While my goal in this book is primarily descriptive, aiming to shed light on the importance of gender and women's activism to the dynamics of conflict over contested sacred space, there is also a prescriptive objective that I want to reiterate in order to clarify my intentions for readers who have a stake in the Israeli–Palestinian conflict, or who are committed to normative neutrality and objectivity. While I believe I remain fair in my portrayal of the three groups, I am not neutral with regard to their objectives. In fact, as an egalitarian liberal feminist, I have a commitment to the notion of equality with at least the minimal requirement that democratic practice uphold equal civil and political rights for all. Permanent military occupation or, alternatively, annexation and extension of sovereignty under which some groups of people enjoy full civil and political rights while others do not, is normatively unacceptable from the perspective of egalitarian liberal feminism. The issue at stake is not various forms of democratic nationalism, "liberal nationalism," or "ethnic democracy."⁴² The ethnonationalist hegemony and domination I address in the context of Jerusalem and of Israel/Palestine is not one of symbolic or minimal preference for a particular national identity (in this case Jewish) within the state. While such models are also questionable from an egalitarian liberal feminist perspective, they are not the subject of the critique here because they simply do not reflect the current system in Jerusalem and in the occupied territories.

Rather, in the current situation the system in place – which I argue the discourse and practice of arguments from religious freedom

support – is one where vast swaths of the population marked by their ethnonationalist difference (Palestinians in Jerusalem – but also and even more so in the West Bank and Gaza) are subject to the sovereignty of the Israeli state but do not possess citizenship rights within it. Thus, ethnonationalist dominance here means that a minority group is denied the most basic right under even a minimal definition of procedural democracy – the right to vote and be elected to parliament. The most fitting definition of the current regime in Israel/Palestine is one of “ethnocracy,” as coined by Oren Yiftachel. Ethnocratic regimes, according to his definition, are neither authoritarian nor democratic.

Such regimes are states which maintain a relatively open government, yet facilitate a non-democratic seizure of the country and polity by one ethnic group. . . . Ethnocracies, despite exhibiting several democratic features, lack a democratic structure. As such, they tend to breach key democratic tenets, such as equal citizenship, the existence of a territorial political community (the demos), universal suffrage, and protection against the tyranny of the majority.⁴³

The critique that I propose, alongside the descriptive elements of the book, is anchored in my normative opposition to such a system. Understanding my assumptions about the unacceptability of unequal civil and political rights for different groups based on their religion (or ethnonational identity, or race, gender, sexuality, etc.) will allow readers to track, and agree or disagree with, my critical assessment of the political objectives and effects of the groups under study.