

“Over our dead bodies”:

Placing Necropolitical Activism

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Analysing a struggle between Palestinian campaigners and Israeli authorities over an ancient Muslim cemetery in Jerusalem, this paper explores the role of necrogeography in contesting urban boundaries, asserting historical legitimacy and realizing emancipatory spatial practices. The article bridges an existing gap between the geographical study of death spaces, and the necropolitical realities of conflict in late modernity. The case-study analyses one arena of contemporary urban geopolitics of death in Israel-Palestine, and the myriad of factors that shape its dynamics of struggle and power relations. The article argues that the multiple avenues of nuanced and creative political action found in necrogeographical research over the past two decades offer a lived alternative to the politics of despair that often dominates the prevailing conceptualizations of necropolitics.

Keywords: Necropolitics, necrogeography, place, activism, Palestine, Israel

If Jerusalem had a “Top 10” list of conflicted sites, December 2005 would have seen a new and unexpected entry: The Mamilla Muslim cemetery – or *Ma’aman Allah*, as it is known in Arabic (meaning “Allah’s safe haven”) would have joined the Temple Mount/*Haram El Sharif*, the Israeli Separation Wall and the Jewish settler enclaves in Palestinian neighborhoods in East Jerusalem. Despite its long history and central location near the bustling downtown of West Jerusalem, Mamilla Cemetery was badly neglected for decades

and attracted little public attention. The relative anonymity of the place was disrupted when controversy broke around plans by the Los Angeles-based Simon Wiesenthal Centre to build a “Museum of Tolerance” on a plot at the edge of the cemetery. Shortly after construction began, human remains were discovered on site and the Israel Archaeological Authority (IAA) was called to exhume the bones. This did not go unnoticed, and in 28 December 2005, a small delegation from the northern branch of the Israeli Islamic Movement arrived on site to inspect the excavation. Though the initial encounter appears to have been cordial (Reiter, 2011, p.19) a political storm soon ensued: accusations that Israel was desecrating an ancient Muslim graveyard drew media headlines and produced a heated domestic and international debate. Despite legal objections and a vocal public campaign to halt the project, the Israeli Supreme Court rejected petitions against the planned museum in October 2008 and final planning approval was granted in July 2011 (Lidman, 2011).

Media coverage and legal procedures focused almost exclusively on the plot designated for the museum, which was surrounded by a tall metal fence, barbed wire and CCTV cameras shortly after excavations began. These imposing fortifications in the middle of the city quite literally overshadowed the remaining grounds of the cemetery.

Aiming to provide a more complete analysis of spatial power and politics, in this article I shift critical attention from the overt operation of violent power to minor spatial practices that utilize geopolitical, material and cultural-discursive sensitivities to reclaim necropolitical agency in this era of late modern conflict. I argue that processes of violent fragmentation and friction that typify late modern colonial occupation (cf. Mbembe, 2003; Weizman, 2007; Azoulay and Ophir, 2008) have dramatically altered the status of territory and in turn, heightened the political importance of the limited places still accessible and available for contesting political interventions. The article therefore offers a dialogue between traditional engagements with the spatiality of death in geography on the one hand, and necropolitics, which considers death as part of contemporary systems of biopolitical governmentality, on the other. The former provides an analytical sensitivity to nuanced

assemblages of death-places, while the latter draws critical attention to the particularities of conflict in late modernity and the challenges they pose for political and geopolitical action.

The case-study analysis is based two research periods in Israel and the Palestinian West Bank in July-September 2010 and June-August 2011. During this time, tensions around the cemetery rose sharply, with weekly demonstrations held in Mamilla and operations to demolish gravestones carried out twice by Israeli authorities. Several of the activists were issued restraining orders by Israeli Police and Shin Bet (Israel's security service), which prevented their access to the site. Every demonstration was monitored and filmed by riot police. Under these conditions, Palestinians who took part in the campaign were increasingly concerned for their personal safety and wary of retribution by authorities. A political environment in which Palestinian-Arab collaboration with Zionist and Israeli authorities has a long and deeply controversial history (Cohen, 2009), poses significant challenges to any researcher seeking ethnographic participant observations (Megoran, 2006), and in particular, one whose name is unmistakably Jewish-Israeli. Only a handful of activists agreed to be recorded or quoted directly. At the same time, the Palestinian campaign in Mamilla made extensive use of print and broadcast media to garner support. This secondary corpus enabled a critical consideration of public narrations, cultural-political tropes and "emotional investments" (Dittmer and Dodds 2008) in the production of an activist necro- and geo-political discourse. Additionally, over 100 hours of participatory observation of demonstrations, gatherings, press briefings and meetings, as well as informal conversations with activists in East Jerusalem and the West Bank provided valuable insights into the dynamic of place-based necro-activism. The theoretical discussion was further grounded by historical data gathered through secondary literature and public documents issued as part of court proceedings or held at the Al Aqsa Institute in East Jerusalem.

Structurally, I set out by drawing the two scholarships incorporated into the analysis of this paper, namely, necrogeography and necropolitics. The following sections constitute the analytical core of the article, demonstrating the significance of closer interrogation of the redrawn lines of urban conflict, its material manifestations and the cultural-political

narratives and horizons revealed through these struggles. I conclude by directly addressing the need for a critical necropolitical agenda that avoids the politics of despair that continues to dominate it.

Interrogating Necropolitics

Over the past two decades, significant analytical effort has been invested in revisiting the socio-culturally and politically contested nature of landscapes associated with death and bereavement. Early research into necrogeography, a term coined by Kniffen (1967), which focused on the spatial logic and architectural features of cemeteries and mortuary landscapes more broadly (Price, 1966; Kniffen, 1967) was followed by more critical approaches that interrogated the cultural politics, power relations and contested meanings that intersect in the making of deathscapes (Hartig and Dunn, 1998; Kong, 1999; Graham and Whelan, 2007; Maddrell and Sidaway, 2010). Particularly in colonial and postcolonial contexts, burial grounds have played a pivotal role in indigenous assertion of history and communal identity (Turnbull, 2002), resistance to land dispossession (Bollig, 1997) and the use of subversive practices in the face of colonial urban policies (Yeoh, 1996; Kong, 2012).

As a ceremonial space of collective solidarity, cemeteries and funerals have long provided powerful arenas where grief can be harnessed for political mobilization (Tamason, 1980). Funeral processions in Northern Ireland and Palestine often turned from ritual to riot (Jarman, 1997; Alimi, 2007; Tarrow, 2011). Wary of the powerful combination of collective grief and anger, the Apartheid regime in South Africa banned mass funerals in the mid 1980s, sparking violent confrontations with Black mourners who defied the decree (Associated Press, 1985; Cowell, 1985). Aretxaga's (1988) work importantly highlights the role of cemeteries and funerals in the social reproduction of radical Basque nationalist ethoi and their significance as arenas of activist socialization. As pivotal sites of performance of national and historical identity (Mosse 1991; Feldman 2007), cemeteries have also been subjected to deliberate destruction during periods of inter-state armed conflict or intra-state ethnic violence. Case studies from Cyprus (Constantinou and Hatay, 2010), Kosovo

(UNESCO, 2005) and Finland (Raivo, 2004) highlight the links between necrogeographies and more explicit geopolitical struggles over sovereignty, borders and territorial possession. Raivo's analysis of the restoration of cemeteries and war graves in Kerelia draws attention to the actions of non-state, voluntary groups involved in reconstruction process (2004, p. 68), and the interconnected re-cultivation of the area's Finnish past.

Despite its stated interest in questions of power and sovereignty (Maddrell and Sidaway 2010b, 5), necrogeographical research has had surprisingly little dialogue with contemporary challenges of urban geopolitics. Three challenges seem particularly relevant in this regard. First, Fregonese (2012, p. 298) rightly urges urban-political scholars to place greater critical emphasis on "those understudied spaces where everyday civility is being maintained at the centre of conflict, and that pass under the radar of official planning and political processes and documents." This is not simply an interest in the mundane manifestation of politics, but a call to explore the myriad of urban networks and infrastructures that are not bound by official planning procedures (Pullan, 2006), and may in fact operate in direct opposition to them (Gandy, 2006). Second, new forms of urban sovereignty are similarly important, particularly in the context of divided cities with competing claims over boundaries, space, and historical rights (Gaffikin and Morrissey 2011; Calame and Charlesworth 2012). These include Agnew's (2005, 456) notion of "actually existing or effective sovereignty" that is not subjected solely to the State, or the idea of hybrid sovereignty which "thinks beyond the State as a secured container of power, and identifies geographies of power shaped *both* by the State *and* by the non-state" (Fregonese, 2012, p. 294).

The third challenge regards the fragmentation of urban space and the rise of enclave geopolitics within the city. Existing conceptualizations of enclave geopolitics focus primarily on cross-border antagonisms concerning what Vinokurov (2007) defines as "hard territorial enclaves", surrounded by a state which has no sovereignty over them and with no direct connection to the mainland. Meanwhile, "soft enclaves" of language, culture and religion (Berger, 2010), are seen to have limited impact on questions of sovereignty, power and

territorial struggles. For urban studies scholars, residential enclaves are used to refer to bounded, enclosed and fortified spaces that attempt to segregate populations and restrict unwanted circulation (Caldeira 1996; 2000). These enclaves operate on a distinct juridico-political structure, and residents are bound by a separate set of rules and norms that are imposed by the governing body of the enclave. Kaker's (2014) research on the enclavisation of Karachi importantly illuminates the emergence of urban enclave geopolitics both as a critical response to global insecurity and as an instrument of intrastate social and ethnic stratification. As clearly defined spaces associated with specific communal, ethnic or religious history, I posit that death spaces function as a spatio-cultural component of a broader "enclave geopolitics" that typifies the struggle over territory in Jerusalem. Though seemingly associated with "soft" cultural enclaves where communal identities and dissenting memories are performed, I argue that necro-places establish a symbolic and physical hold on territory and are therefore powerful geopolitical instruments in establishing political-historical "strongholds" in the conflicted urban space.

As I discuss at greater length below, the effectiveness of necrogeographical activism derives from its ambiguous position (literally) between the living and the dead. If popular geopolitics focuses "on the everyday intersection of the human body with places, environments, objects, and discourses linked to geopolitics" (Dittmer and Gray, 2010, p. 1673), what, then, is the role of the *dead body*, in its corporeal form and more specifically through its spatial and material representations, in this everyday order of power?

This question highlights the surprising absence of serious consideration of the relationship between necrogeography and the critical interest in necropolitics. For Mbembe (2003), necropolitics in late modernity signifies the ultimate expression of sovereignty, namely the power and the capacity to dictate who may live and who may die. Necropolitics is not simply reducible to the politics of death spaces. Rather, this conceptualization directly emerges out of the contemporary moment of the everywhere war, in which war becomes a continuity in social and political life (Gregory 2010; 2011; Jabri 2006). For over a decade, key political categories of modernity – the state, citizenship, democratic space – are

increasingly overshadowed by the realities of bare life that dominate the multiple configurations of contemporary conflict. As Jabri (2006) emphasizes, the operations of power in late modern conflict produce subject positions that are differentially located in relation to the politics of life and the politics of death. State-sanctioned differentiation is of course not one sided; necropolitics shapes a specific embodied response to power, but in Mbembe's work, this response is epitomized by the catastrophic figure of the martyr, the suicide bomber.

Yet place is hardly ever referred to as a worthy necropolitical unit of analysis. As others have noted more broadly, this analytical tendency to overlook the power of place risks obfuscating material and social contingencies (Harker 2009; Robinson 2003), but more profoundly, fails to account for the nuances of contemporary political action, almost to the point where Palestinian agency is completely pacified. What is often lost in the discussion of late modern necropolitics is exactly the site specificity, cultural nuances and political contingency of resistance, which were so central to geographical engagement with death places noted above. Seeking to bridge the gap between these two bodies of work, this paper provides an account of ground-level necropolitical action, as well as critical reflections on necrogeography's challenges in the face contemporary geopolitics of the everywhere war.

Despite these critical reservations, Mbembe further posits two questions that call attention to the concrete sites where death and power intersect: "What place is given to life, death, and the human body (in particular the wounded or slain body)? How are they inscribed in the order of power?" (2003, p. 12). The first question invites a closer scrutiny of the *places* where necropolitical struggle happens, though Mbembe's analysis remains mostly remote from the particularities and materiality of place. A place-based approach enables an important shift of analytical focus from the blunt operation of necropolitics in zones of overt conflict to "petty sovereign" (Butler, 2004) acts and sites through which it expands its reach, but also where it is exposed to the contingencies of lived space. By the second question, Mbembe prompts a closer reconsider the notion of inscription—the physical and symbolic acts through which matter and meaning are demarcated both by powerful actors and by

those seeking to challenge their authority. The argument here pushes against a critical vocabulary of war in late modernity that is dominated by notions of erasure and place annihilation (S. Graham 2004; Makdisi 2010; Weizman 2009), by re-illuminating political contingencies and nuanced dynamics of contestation. Necropolitical activism documented here defies both the highly technological remote violence or the crude operation or the diametrically opposite pole that typifies conflict zones in late modernism –warlords, suicide bombers, mutilated bodies and entire blocks turned to rubble (Gregory 2010). The intellectual bridge between necrogeography and necropolitics seeks to introduce the challenges of contemporary political and geopolitical conflict to the analytical framework of the former, while highlighting socio-cultural subtleties and greater nuances of power in the latter.

Till's (2012a) powerful argument for a place-based ethical responsibility that is "tied to a sense of active citizenship and radical democracy" clearly resonates in this article's effort to re-conceptualize the necropolitics of place. Challenging urban scholars to better account for the lived geographies of the city, Till importantly inserts political urgency into place-based memory-work that is not confined to identity politics or a struggle against capitalist creative destruction (Till, 2012b, p. 23). Attentive to both methods of direct action and creative intervention, Till describes projects that offer social stability and security despite the ongoing ruptures of geographies of displacement and exclusion. I take Till's conceptualization a step further to argue that rescaling the analytical focus on place-oriented activism does not mark a withdrawal from or disinterest in major geopolitical challenges (over territory, sovereignty, borders), but constitutes an important arena for creative contestation of hegemonic urban and state-level geopolitics. This critical interest in the lived experience of deathscapes importantly expands the contemporary necropolitical focus on governance of lives verging on the edges of death, relegated to spaces of exception and subjected to systematic processes of spatial and corporeal destruction. Defying the politics of killing and dying in which "resistance and self-destruction are synonymous" (Mbembe,

2003, p. 36) exposes a potentially broader conceptualization of necropolitics guided by emancipatory tactics borne out of but not condemned by the place of death.

The uses and abuses of necrogeography: Redrawing lines

Almost every academic discussion or NGO report on Jerusalem's conflicted nature includes a map that, with some variations in style and emphasis, provides a striking visualization of the complex matrix of Israeli presence in East Jerusalem. Yet equally striking is the portrayal of West Jerusalem, the part of the city that was under Israeli control between 1949 and 1967, as a categorically separate territory: the entire western part of the city, with its social and ethnic diversity, religious tensions and history of violence, is presented as a homogeneous space where the ideal of the Jewish nation-state has been fully realized and is therefore empty of conflict. However, viewing this prevailing urban geopolitics through a necrogeographical prism reveals a more complex dynamic of territorial occupation and contestation: death-spaces draw critical attention to the porosity of boundaries and the subterranean spatialities that form an essential part of Jerusalem's geopolitics of enclaves.

Much critical attention has been given to Israeli transgression of the Green Line, the 1949 Armistice line that separated Israel from the Jordanian-controlled West Bank and East Jerusalem. Since 1967, the physical, legal and economic realities of Israel's control system in the Occupied Palestinian Territories (Kimmerling 1989) have rendered the Green Line all but meaningless as a consistent differentiating marker. And nowhere has the erosion of pre-1967 divisions been as palpable as in Jerusalem, where the Israeli annexation of the eastern parts of the city in the early 1980s was accompanied by the construction of large settlement enclaves that strategically fragmented the Arab-Palestinian conurbation (Figure 1). This "enclave geopolitics" increasingly took on a local scale, with Jewish groups buying isolated properties in the Muslim Quarter of the Old City and in Palestinian neighborhoods adjacent to it (Dumper 1992). Importantly, the tactical Judaization of East Jerusalem heavily relied on the transformation of cultural and historical geographies in the city: rediscovering spaces of Jewish past through archeology and conservation became instrumental in solidifying the

Jewish claim to the city and blurring the pre-1967 divisions (Silberman, 2001; Greenberg and Keinan, 2007; Greenberg 2009; Pullan and Gwiazda, 2009).

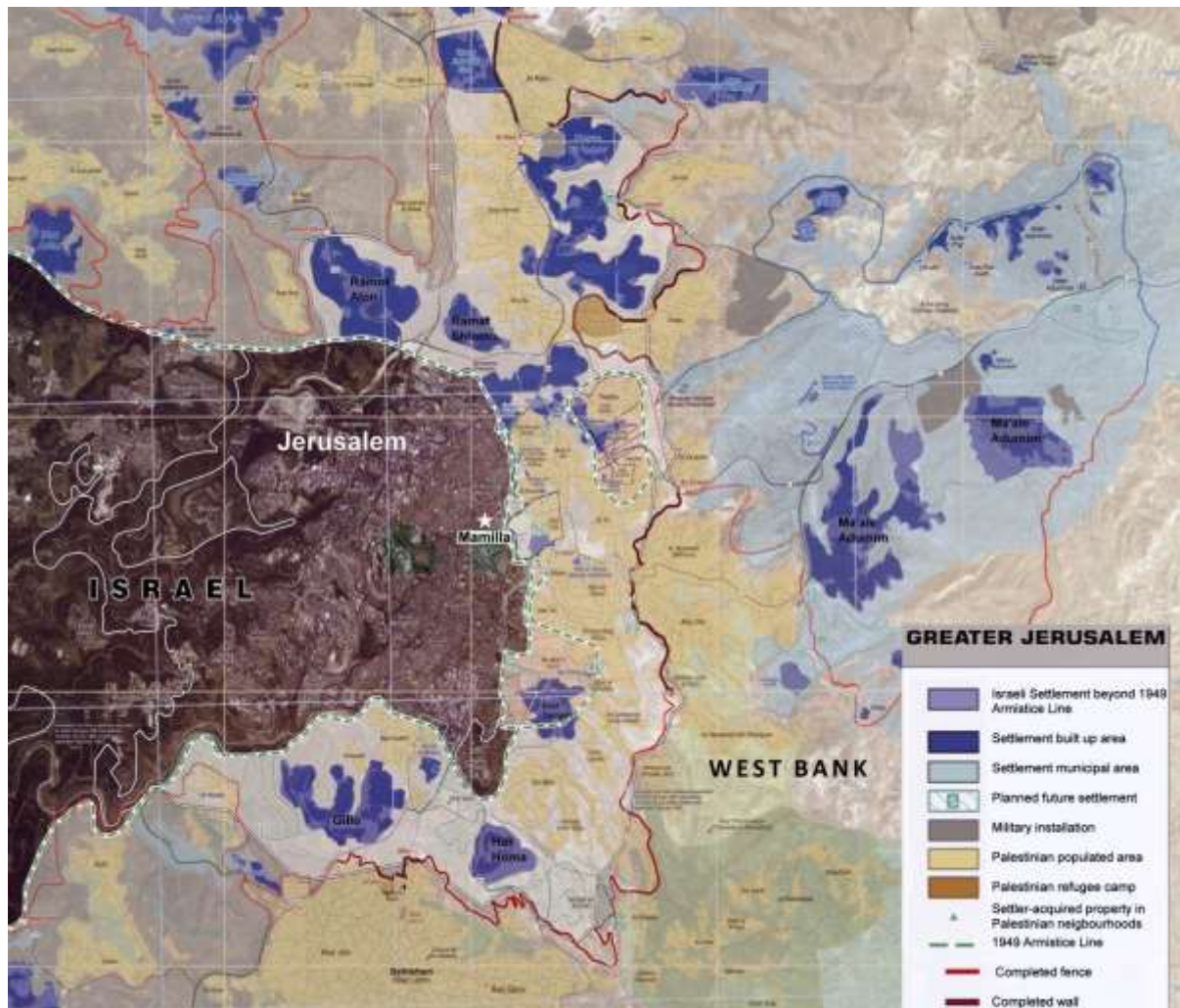


Figure 1: Greater Jerusalem map. Author rendition based on CIA Remote Sensing Map, 2006.

Israel's activity in the graveyard metropolis east of the Old City illustrates the use and abuse of necrogeography in solidifying Jewish control in East Jerusalem, both on the physical territory and the symbolic meaning of that space. The area, which until 1967 was under Jordanian control, comprises two ancient Jewish burial grounds—the Mount of Olives cemetery and biblical-era graves in the Kidron Valley—and the Muslim cemetery of Bab al-Rahma (Figure 2). Partly because of its size and religious significance, the Mt. of Olives cemetery has also become a symbol of Jewish recuperation of ancestral land. Recent years have seen a sharp increase in government investment in rehabilitation and development projects in and around the cemetery, including widespread reconstruction of gravestones, an

increase in security patrols and improved infrastructure to promote tourism to the site (Ofran 2011). However, these policies must be seen in relation to the location of the cemetery at the heart of a densely-populated Palestinian part of the city and efforts throughout East Jerusalem to create a demographic and geographic urban reality that will prevent any future division of the city.

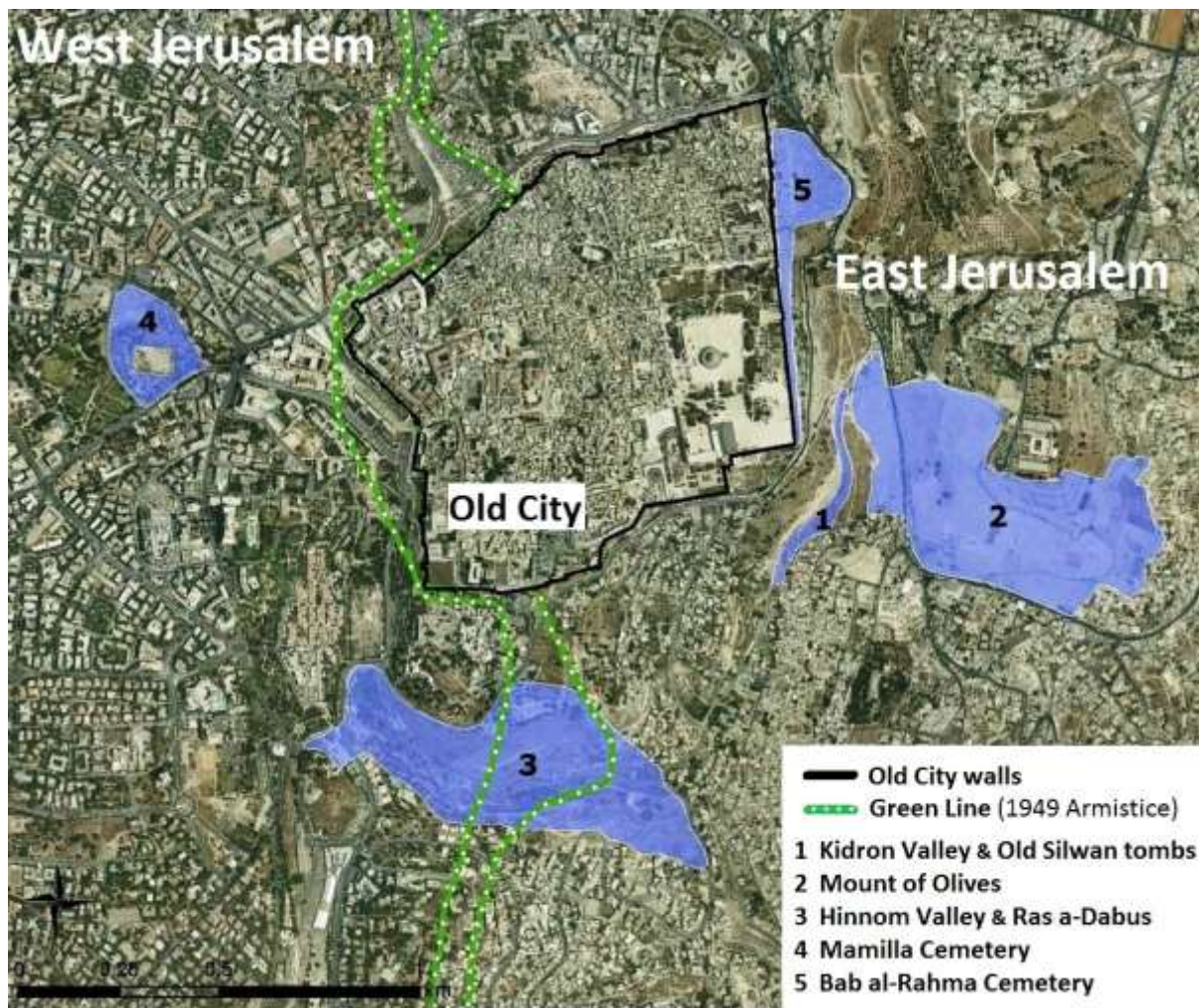


Figure 2: Cemeteries in Jerusalem's Holy Basin.

Such necrogeographical policies of incursion are often viewed horizontally, as “a wedge that blocks geographic continuity for the adjacent Palestinian neighborhoods, and simultaneously create[s] a bridge and continuity between the Jewish settlement[s]” (Mizrachi, 2011, p. 4). But recent conceptualizations of the volumetric dimensions of power (Weizman, 2007; Elden, 2013; Graham and Hewitt, 2013) call our attention to the role of cemeteries in the struggle over vertical superiority, or more precisely, the political contest

over subterranean space. The Zionist use of archaeology to establish its ancestral claims to the land has been thoroughly analyzed (e.g. Abu El-Haj, 2001; Hallote and Joffe, 2002; Kletter, 2006). Weizman (2007) clearly demonstrates the contemporary geopolitical manifestations of this logic in Israel's excavations under the Temple Mount (see also Pullan and Gwiazda, 2009; Gori, 2013). Cemeteries are yet another component of this volumetric power matrix. Even though its subterranean stratum is invisible and impenetrable, the cemetery attains its significance as rooted and immovable from this assumed underground spatiality. Colonization through the assertion of vertical control is realized not only through the emphasis of Jewish roots, but also by restricting Palestinian access to subterranean space: In Bab al-Rahma cemetery, situated just east of the Temple Mount, Palestinian residents of Silwan are banned from carrying out any new burials after Israeli police suggested the new graves were infringing on a national archaeological park (Shragai, 2007).

Despite an obvious Israeli ability to assert control over horizontal and vertical space, there is a need to avoid a reification of victimhood and account for the dynamic role Palestinians assume in the political reality of late modern war. Challenging the assumed unidirectional permeability of the Green Line and Israel's apparent monopoly on establishing its presence in East Jerusalem is one practice that helps reassert Palestinian political agency in this space.

For Palestinians in Israel, the occupied territories and in the diaspora, areas west of the Green Line—in Israel “proper”—are laden with significant historical sites and memories, and are an integral part of the Palestinian geography of identity. Palestinian villages, towns and neighborhoods depopulated in the Palestinian *Nakba* (“catastrophe”), and which became part of Israel after the 1948 War, remain central to Palestinian identity through cultural representations (Sa'di and Abu-Lughod 2007), communal visits (Slyomovics 1998; Ben-Ze'ev and Aburaiya 2004) and more recently, through organized events of commemoration and documentation (Lentin 2007; Leshem 2010). In addition to their significance as sites of longing and cultural expression, former Arab places also highlight the arbitrariness of geopolitical boundaries like the Green Line, and constitute alternative

political cartographies of emotion and intimacy (Riyya and El Ma'alleh, 2013; Jonker and Till, 2009).

Rather than seek to reverse the policies that have so extensively blurred the Green Line in Jerusalem, Palestinian campaigners in Mamilla challenge the assumption that this process is categorically unidirectional, i.e. limited to Jewish-Israeli encroachment on and expansion in Arab-Palestinian space. Weekly vigils held in Mamilla cemetery during spring and summer 2011 were organized by representatives of the Israeli Islamic movement, but were attended by residents of Silwan who were prohibited from burying their dead in Bab al-Rahma Cemetery, as well as members of prominent Palestinian families whose relatives are buried in Mamilla. The presence of Palestinian citizens of Israel, East Jerusalem Palestinians and—to a lesser extent due to movement restrictions—Palestinians from the West Bank, at the heart of predominantly Jewish downtown West Jerusalem, illustrated the radical potential of a porous urban border: in quite the same manner that Israel was able to use necrogeography to form strategic enclaves in East Jerusalem, Palestinian activists are redrawing the city's map of conflict by re-activating Palestinian places and laying claim to parts of the city that have traditionally been considered uncontroversial. By no longer adhering to the logic of urban separation which clings to the Green Line as its primary trope—or in the words of one activist, “refusing to exchange Silwan for Mamilla”—the activists demonstrate that the realities of an unresolved conflict cannot be confined to the eastern parts of the city.

The weekly vigils in Mamilla attracted only a few dozen activists, certainly not a critical mass in a metro area of over a million people. But it is through the location and use of the specific place that these small vigils are able to present an alternative imagination of urban boundaries that defies and transgresses hegemonic impositions. Israeli practices in East Jerusalem have proven the disruptive impact of what I earlier termed ‘enclave geopolitics’, the power of small enclosed places to challenge prevailing geopolitical realities. Settler houses at the heart of Palestinian neighborhoods, often inhabited by only small groups, can bring about a profound change in the strategic status of these urban areas. I

would argue that by re-establishing a cultural-historical stronghold in the predominantly-Jewish West Jerusalem, Palestinian activists are similarly seeking to present a broader challenge to a Western geopolitical consensus that perceives these parts of the city as uncontested. These spatial tactics call into question the prevailing concentration on Israel's "besieging cartographies" (Mansour, 2001 quoted in Gregory, 2004), which supposedly reduce Palestinians to passive targets. Theoretically, this case prompts urban-political scholars to seriously consider the impact of cultural enclaves on urban geopolitics: Can these sites break away from the dominant mold that correlates exclusionary enclaved spaces with fragmented citizenship and a splintered polity (Graham and Marvin, 2001; Alsayyad and Roy, 2006), or, following Holston (1998, p. 48), can these sites offer spaces for insurgent citizenship, "introducing into the city identities and practices that disturb established histories"? The following section focuses directly on the materialities of necropolitical place-making, and suggests that in this process, highly localized, micro-scale interventions expose extreme sensitivities and instigate severe reaction, highlighting their critical role in shaping present and future urban conflicts.

The materiality of necropolitical place

In 2007, the Islamic Movement carried out cleaning and rehabilitation work in the Mamilla cemetery. Volunteers and contractors removed large amounts of waste and weeds from the cemetery and restored the headstones that had fallen into disrepair after decades of neglect and occasional acts of vandalism. The restoration included repairs to damaged graves and also the recreation of grave markers from shattered headstones. In an interview, Mohammed Aghbaria, a lawyer representing the Islamic Movement, explained that often a circle of stones or a base are all that remains from a grave. Where grave markings are not found on the ground, workers dug a few centimeters down to find the stone sealing the grave and set up the tombstone accordingly. Unmarked graves were left without an inscription (Hasson 2010).

It did not take long until the improved appearance of Mamilla cemetery triggered a response from Israeli officials and the authorities involved. The Jerusalem Municipality and the Israel Land Administration (ILA), a state apparatus controlling and managing all state land, including large tracts of Arab-Palestinian land expropriated after the 1948 War under the Absentee Property Laws, charged that the restoration activity in Mamilla amounted to “a fraudulent set up, one of the biggest in recent years, whose aim is to illegally take over state land” (Ward 2010). In an illuminating statement, an Israeli right-wing parliamentarian argued that “The Arabs are trying to conquer the Land of Israel in every possible way. [...] We need to plough the area and take down all of the fictitious tombs” (Ronen, Ezra, and Cohen 2010). These were not concerns that Palestinian funeral processions will start making their way once again to Mamilla Cemetery, but an implicit recognition that this struggle is in fact about the fundamental questions of historical legitimacy, political agency and the delineation of territorial borders. Both reactions interpret a relatively local action as an act of conquest on a national scale, in effect confirming the power of place-based action to far exceed its site-specificity and transform an overlooked urban corner into a geopolitical hotspot.

Responding to the accusations of deception, the Islamic Movement's Spokesperson Mahmoud Abu Atta said that all of the markers were constructed atop genuine graves, though he reiterated that in some cases very little was left of the original (Ward 2010). In an extremely pertinent admission, a leading activist in Al Aqsa's Committee of Muslim Graves in Jerusalem indicated that the precise location of the gravestones was beyond the point:

"If you dig a few meters down anywhere here you will find bones. This cemetery has been in use for a thousand years... one grave on top of the other for all those years. So if the [head]stone is a couple of meters to the left or to the right, does this make the big difference?" (MAZ, 2011).

This rationale was not enough to stop the bulldozers. In August 2010, municipal and ILA crews accompanied by police began arriving at night to demolish over 200 tombstones they deemed “fictitious”, while graves that the city saw as “genuine” were left untouched.

Though several scholars have analyzed different dimensions of the Mamilla conflict (Makdisi, 2010; Reiter, 2011; Larkin and Dumper, 2012), the clash over the authenticity of the rehabilitated gravestones remains largely overlooked and under-theorized. This focus on the gravestone as a critical geopolitical signifier, almost detached from the body of the dead it marks, sets this discussion apart from other debates that place their analytical focus on the dead body as the pivotal object of geopolitical mobilization (Young and Light 2012; Verdery 1999). After hundreds of years of layered burial in Mamilla, most of the tombstones no longer function as the markers of individual death, but as designations of the site’s cultural and religious significance. The admittance that the reconstructed headstones’ location is symbolic rather than an indication of a single burial place—“dig anywhere and you will find bones”—is a candid illustration of cultural constructivism more broadly: practices of invention and imagination are an inseparable part of the process through which a community establishes its relation to the past. However, in a geopolitical arena dominated by conflict over land and historical rights, the question of authenticity, and the authenticity of spatial markers of ethnonational history and heritage in particular, is not only a matter of scholarly debate but a political instrument in the hands of those seeking to undermine contesting claims of ancestral bonds to the land. Cultural anthropologists like Linnekin (1991) and Briggs (1996) have engaged with the political sensitivities exposed by the discourse of cultural invention, which remains closely associated with deception and violation of a presumed authenticity and as such, “is an emotional, political issue for indigenous peoples, particularly for those who are engaged in a struggle for sovereignty” (Linnekin, 1991, p. 446). Recent statements by conservative American politicians claiming the Palestinians are an “invented” people (Davidson, 2012) further highlight the cynical abuse of the term and the sensitivities it exposes. The critical challenge posed by Mamilla necro-activists is not, I would argue, whether or not the reconstructed grave markers are

“authentic”, but their ability to contest hegemonic spatio-politics and in re-infusing such places with cultural, social and political meaning.

Like other cultural-political practices, the power of invention is not equally attainable. Since the publication of Hobsbawm and Ranger’s (1992) foundational collection, invention of tradition was seen as “a practice very much used by authorities as an instrument of rule” (Said, 2000, p. 179). A geographically and historically diverse corpus emerged out of the assumption that the power to successfully realize and materialize imaginary geographies rested primarily with colonial powers or agents operating under the auspice of the (post-colonial) nation-state (Gregory, 1995; Radcliffe, 1996; Schwartz and Ryan, 2003). Handler (1988) points particular attention to spatial imaginations as an emancipatory practice. He suggests that, “to meet the challenge of an outsider’s denial of national existence, nationalists must claim and specify the nation’s possessions: they must delineate and if possible secure a bounded territory, and they must construct an account of the unique culture and history that attaches to and emanates from the people who occupy it” (ibid, 154) However, contemporary urban enclave geopolitics emerges specifically because attempts to establish physical and symbolic control over large, contiguous portions of the city have been frustrated or tactically surrendered to secure economic, social and political privileges (Koonings and Kruijt, 2007; Calame and Charlesworth, 2012; Kaker, 2014). The scale of historical-political operation must therefore also undergo a critical reconsideration, from scholarly focus on efforts to secure bounded territories and grand historical narratives, to place-based interventions/inventions, at times on a scale no larger than a common headstone.

Taking a broader historical view reveals a precedent that contextualizes notions of invention and the national-religious production of place, and illustrates its performed nature and ambiguous relation to “historical facts” (Kurtz, 2002). In the 1950s, Mamilla attracted the attention of Israel’s director general of the Religious Affairs Ministry, Shmuel Kahana. Seeking to reshape the sacred geography of Palestine after the establishment of Israel, Kahana associated hundreds of Arab geographical landmarks with Jewish traditions and history to create “sacred hubs in areas where no ancient Jewish sanctity was previously to be

found” (Bar, 2008, p.10). The Judaization of Muslim sacred sites, and Muslim graves in particular, became a symbol of Jewish sovereignty and one of the ways Zionism sought to reclaim Jewish history in the land. In Mamilla, Kahana intended to turn a cave identified in Muslim sources as the *Shuhada* – or “martyrs” – cave, into a Jewish pilgrimage site called the Lion’s Cave, associating it with a myth about a Lion who guarded bones of Jewish defenders of Jerusalem (Anon. 1950). Kahana understood that the power of mythology does not rely on historical accuracy, but as Hobsbawm put it, “on a process of formalization and ritualization” (1992, 4). In his exploration of religious place-making, Halbwachs (1980) goes even further when he argues that “The faithful need only wish collectively to commemorate at a given site some act or personal aspect of God, in order that such remembrances become connected with this location, enabling the remembrances themselves to be recovered.” As it happens, Kahana’s attempt to transform the Shuhada Cave by garnering such a “collective wish” was rejected by the Jewish religious establishment and the place was abandoned. In this context, the “invention of graves” by Palestinian campaigners in Mamilla is not only the invention of spatial traditions, but a subversive appropriation of spatial practices that were assumed to be the sole property of the hegemonic majority.

If colonization is “predicated on the deliberate, physical, cultural and symbolic appropriation of space” (Smith and Katz, 1993, p. 69), what is the function of counter appropriation of the sort encountered in Mamilla? I am cognizant of Jacobs’ (1996, p. 142) warning against a simplistic use of appropriation as an interpretative method, which risks rendering “passive those whose [...] cultural properties are seemingly appropriated, not only without consent, but without opposition, negotiation or, even, some unintentional consequence which might destabilize the colonialist foundations of the transaction”. Deleuze and Guattari’s (1986) notion of “minor” practices provides a more nuanced account of the political exchange involved in this process and the political effects of these cultural-spatial practices, leaving aside the heated deliberations over authenticity and originality. Deleuze and Guattari defined minor literature in terms of “deterritorialization”, “politicization” and “collectivization”. Viewed through this analytical prism, the place-based practices in Mamilla

detritorialize a hegemonic instrument, the national invention of spatial traditions, and turn it into an instrument of subaltern agency. Simultaneously, such practices of place-making highlight necrogeographical space as a place of collective political action rather than only a site of personal or familial mourning and memory. Though many of the campaigners against the Museum of Tolerance belong to families whose ancestors are buried in Mamilla – like the Nusseibeh and Khalidi families – the decision of the Islamic Movement to initiate direct, place-based action and the Israeli use of force to ensure its exclusive control over certain place-making practices significantly expanded the visibility of the site and emphasized its symbolic importance as part of a broad Palestinian political geography.

The place-based work carried out in Mamilla importantly adds another dimension to Deleuze and Guarrati's triad, namely, the re-territorialization and materialization of political action. Conscious that "In a very literal way the Palestinian predicament since 1948 is that to be a Palestinian at all has been to live in a utopia, a nonplace, of some sort" (Said, 1980, p. 124 emphasis in the original), I posit that the activists' engagement with the materiality of the gravestone constitutes a different *quality* of political engagement. In a very literal sense, this intervention exceeds common political performance and becomes a physical act of place-making. Mending broken graves and cleaning the cemetery clearly resonates with what Karen Till defines as "place-based ethics of care", individual and group acts that communicate the experience of lived place "based upon psychic attachments, materialities, bodily and social memories, and fragile social ecologies" (Till, 2012, p. 4).

In their responses, Israeli officials criticize these actions for failing the test of "scientific authenticity", but in doing so, they also illuminate the epistemological conflict that underlies the struggle over the cemetery: confining the debate to bureaucratic procedures and seemingly empirical measures of historical truth prevents other sensitivities, emotive relations and historical affinities from making any meaningful impact on urban-political policy, or worse, are seen as dangerous transgressions that must be forcefully acted against. Performances of place-based ethics of care have no place, so to speak, in "pedagogical knowledges" (Bhabha, 1994) that prioritize stable, rationalist and progressivist forms of

nationalist narrative. Yet the material intimacy conveyed in the repair of headstones constitute what Fanon (1963, p. 182) describes as “zones of occult instability”, spaces that enable the materialization of political critique, collective aspirations and affective networks connecting otherwise fragmented people and places.

Broken Graves: Steadfastness as weak urban power

Most of the repaired gravestones were demolished in two “operations” carried out by the ILA and the Jerusalem Municipality in 2010 and 2011. In this section I explore the political efficacy of necropolitical action performed under the shadow of destruction. I begin by briefly situating the destruction of graves in a broader political-conceptual framework of infra-(de)structure, and some of the theoretical and political problems associated with it. Considering the significance of ruined necro-space through the notion of *Sumud* (steadfastness), I suggest a refocus of analytical attention to the contingencies of place, and bring to the fore the weak orders of power (Sassen, 2010) that challenge some of the suppositions that still dominate critical spatio-political scholarship.

It is important to view the Israeli authorities’ actions in Mamilla in a broader political-conceptual context. Azoulay situates the destruction of Palestinian space as a foundational element of the Israeli regime, and a feature that has been intrinsic to its very *raison d’être*:

In 1948 the Israeli regime began to demolish houses and has not stopped ever since. A massive destruction of about 200,000 houses cannot be measured by justification, as it were, of each specific case. This is a regime project as a whole, the intrinsic structure of the polis: its infra-(de)structure. This is no superficial destruction limited to one place or another, but a viral phenomenon to which no place in this space is immune. It is part of the regime’s existence formation; continuous destruction preserves the constituent violence of ‘48 that devastated the Palestinian home and has made the Palestinian home an object for potential demolition or confiscation. (Azoulay, 2011)

Azoulay joins a number of other political geographers (Falah, 1996; Graham, 2004) urban studies and architecture scholars (LeVine, 2005; Misselwitz and Rieniets, 2006; Weizman, 2007) and political sociologists (Hanafi, 2009; Sassen, 2010) seeking to conceptualize spatial violence in Israel-Palestine, particularly since the second Palestinian uprising of October 2000. Azoulay's framework of infra-(de)structural acts, regime practices rooted in the production of ethno-national political space in general (see also Golan, 2001; Yiftachel, 2006), stands out for its historical breadth, relating past and present ruinations in diverse places and historical circumstances. However, like other critical models of ruination, this framework is concerned almost exclusively with the actions of the state, with no significant attention to the agency of individuals and groups subjected to these regime acts (see also Harker, 2009). Moreover, the specific qualities of place are often overshadowed by acts of ruination. Given the obfuscation of place, I would like to further ask: What is unique about the destruction of graves? What sets them apart from other spaces that have been subjected to such infra-(de)structural action?

The postcolonial historian and critic John Noyes provides one of the most theoretically informed analyses of the role of the grave as a spatial marker of possession, "the position from which the marks of blood on the land become meaningful is established as a geo-political position: the position which refuses to leave the land *because* the script of blood has effected its purchase" (Noyes, 1992, p. 255). The idealization of the land, a common trope of territorial collective identity, is concretely manifested in the grave, a spatial object where soil, ancestral rights and the sacrifice of past generations coincide (Winter, 1998; Smith, 2009). In this sense, the grave functions as a *Tabu*, the Ottoman title registry deed still used in Israel to establish land rights. Yet, unlike other spatial features—a cultivated field, a home or a public building—the grave constitutes a symbolic *Tabu* of a unique kind, which not only states one's present relation to the land, but also conveys an historical relation that has been achieved through loss and suffering.

In interviews, young Palestinian activists in Mamilla noted the material quality of the grave and its vertical penetration into the ground, analogizing this with the roots of the olive

tree, perhaps the most recognized symbol of Palestinian *sumud* (steadfastness) on the land. As Hillel Cohen (2011) explains, since the mid-1970s, the very act of clinging to the land and preserving its Arab identity became an expression of national patriotism. In fact, *sumud* emerged as a response to Israeli occupation of the West Bank and Gaza Strip in 1967 and Palestinian determination not to allow the mass expulsions of 1948 to repeat themselves (see also Yiftachel 2002). Yet what started as a passive steadfastness, soon took on a more dynamic form of *sumud muqawim* (resistant *sumud*), an ideology and practice that helped energize self-help local services committees (Farsoun and Landis, 1990, p. 28). In the necropolitical present, resistance, or *muqawima*, is often narrowly interpreted as an armed resistance doctrine, a political platform that endorses violence as a legitimate anti-colonial instrument. Suicide bombing, which Mbembe alludes to, is one such practice. The graves in Mamilla, however, perform a much more subtle and sophisticated act of necropolitical resistance, providing both the inspiration for and the manifestation of contemporary *sumud muqawim*: entitlement to the land is not only the result of passive historical presence nor legitimized through the violent sacrifice of self and others, but also emerges out of a willingness to shape material and spatial realities and reinvigorate a socio-political collective (Khalidi, 2011).

Given the forceful response of Israeli national and municipal authorities against the reconstructed headstones, does the destruction of graves also result in the destruction of the Palestinian *Tabu*? In a critique of the Museum of Tolerance project, Makdisi (2010) argues that Mamilla features an extreme case of “double erasure” where the initial act of displacement is followed by a secondary erasure of the memory of the primary violence perpetrated. Images of the reconstructed gravestones being bulldozed also bring to mind Graham’s seminal analysis of Israel’s destructive spatiopolitics. In particular, Graham noted how Israel’s policy of urbicide by bulldozer “represents a collective denial of the existential rights of Palestinians to urban living space and to the fruits of urban and infrastructural modernisation” (Graham, 2004, p. 209). Viewed through this prism, the Palestinian necropolis is as threatening as the Palestinian metropolis, both constituting disorderly

spaces that undermine the Israeli control of the occupied space. The bulldozer, in this framework, functions as an erasing machine harnessed to prevent activists from establishing any facts on the ground that could potentially challenge Israel's control over the urban space and its symbolic-historical significance.

Yet the nuanced dynamic of spatial contestation taking place in Mamilla is largely absent from Graham and Makdisi's analyses of explicit state ideological and cultural violence. In her analysis of the urbanization of war, Sassen importantly highlights the role of "the city as a weak regime that can obstruct and temper the destructive capacity of the superior military power" (2010, p. 38). Greater attention to multiple weak regimes operating in and through the space of this city is crucial to avoid a reification of destruction and to illuminate a more complex power matrix. The gravestones may have been bulldozed, but the demolition did anything but erase the Palestinian presence from the space of the cemetery. Here again, the materiality of the grave is essential in understanding its political efficacy. Through the piles of debris that scar Mamilla today, the bulldozers inscribe an indictment against the same authorities that instructed their work in the first place. Making use of international media – El-Arabiya, Associated Press, and numerous English- and Arabic-Language blogs – activists were able to publically undermine the official justifications for the museum (education to promote tolerance) and the state's subsequent pretence of enforcing "spatial order" in the cemetery. Furthermore, the ruination of gravestones, irrespective of their authenticity, amplifies the emotive relation of activists to the place and ties the sacrifice of the past—the soldiers of Saladin who are believed to be buried in Mamilla—with their suffering in the present. As Renan observed, "suffering in common unifies more than joy does. Where national memories are concerned, griefs are of more value than triumphs, for they impose duties, and require a common effort" (2004, p. 19). A similar sentiment was echoed by one of the activists in Mamilla, a 23-year-old man:

"My heart breaks when I see the destruction. We had people stay here at night to watch out for this sort of Israeli operation. When the police started to arrive we called everybody and alerted the media as well. That didn't work- we failed to stop them.

But you have to understand: The most important thing is to remain... you have to fight even if you lose.” (Bashar, 2011)

In Bashar’s comment, affect and action become the powerful components in the formulation of 21st century *sumud muqawim*. To avoid a two-dimensional portrayal of power relations in the conflicted city of late modern colonial occupation, urban-political scholarship needs to remain attentive to this subtler geopolitical vocabulary that underpins contemporary forms of Palestinian political action. The long history of infra-(de)structure cannot be confined to a tale of state violence, but constitutive of oppositional spatial traditions. In the concluding remarks I argue that necrogeographical activism enables us to radically expand the scope of necropolitical discourse, from its focus on technologies of killing to the political mechanism of living.

Conclusion: Necropolitics for the Living

Though critical scholars have thoroughly scrutinized the operation of the Israeli occupation in the Palestinian Territories and its pervasive impact on Palestinian space, more subtle contradictions in the operation of power and forms of oppositional spatial politics play a relatively marginal role in theorization of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. In this analytical hierarchy, the *place* of political action is largely absent. Undoubtedly, policies of fragmentation have left increasingly isolated places where political action can be carried out and resistance maintained. But the analytical and theoretical importance of place is far from diminished in this spatio-political reality. In fact, the confined realities of place politics challenge some of the broad conceptualizations of space and power and call for greater attention to new dynamics of power and critical political horizons.

Palestinian activism in Mamilla illuminates the changing politics of necrogeography in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and more broadly, the political dynamic that governs spaces of death and mourning. In recent years, for example, Israeli security forces in East Jerusalem have banned families of Palestinians killed while carrying out violent acts against Israelis, from erecting mourning tents where family and friends gather during the bereavement period. In this sense, necroactivism in Mamilla challenges what Butler (2004,

p. 32) identifies as a highly political “hierarchy of grief”, which deems certain public mourning as offensive to such an extent that it poses a threat meriting military intervention (see also Morton 2014). Shifting the analytical focus to the political role of death *places* refocuses attention on such extensive patterns of oppression, but equally, reveals resilient layers of political and cultural activism that stand against their perpetuation. Unlike larger scales of operation, these places vividly illuminate the agency of the occupied and the alliances built through a shared experience of place—between Silwan and Mamilla, Islamic activists and secular Palestinian intellectuals, those residing west of the Green Line and those east of it. This critical “placing” thus exposes a more radical conceptualization of necrogeographical politics and contestation.

Rescaling the unit of geopolitical analysis also provides important insights into the deeper currents shaping the goals and ideology of resistance. In his formative discussion of necropolitics, Mbembe, following Paul Gilroy, posits that in extreme circumstances of late modern colonial occupation, death becomes a form of agency, a reassertion of the subject’s redemptive power in conditions of aggressive biopolitical policing (Mbembe, 2003, p. 39). What is happening in Mamilla is a subtle and sophisticated reformulation of the necropolitical order: it makes clear political use of death but avoids the overwhelming despair of suicidal acts. A crucial distinction is made here, focusing on the agency of death rather than the agency of dying. The multiple avenues of political action made available through the use of death-places, from the redrawing of urban geopolitical boundaries to the subversive appropriation of hegemonic practices and the materialization of cultural-political ideals, stand in sharp contrast to the politics of despair that dominate prevailing conceptualizations of necropolitics in late modernity.

During the Supreme Court appeal against the construction of the Museum of Tolerance, the museum’s initiators argued that the project must be allowed to proceed because the needs of the living trump the needs of the dead (Procaccia *et al*, 2008). Palestinians opposing the museum may not wholly disagree, but would also probe who are the “living” for whose needs are catered? And whose dead are supposed to make way for

these needs? Such questions exceed the symbolic struggle over heritage and cultural presence and challenge the deep biases that lie at the heart of ethnocentric governance, its inherent contradictions and potential weaknesses.

These questions also point to necrogeography's potential contribution to contemporary debates on biopolitics, critical geopolitics and urban activism. As the analysis here demonstrates, building on its social and cultural foundations, as well as its attentive approach to the nuances of place, necrogeography can reclaim, challenge and expand the often narrow application of necropolitics in these debates. This however, will require a more critical engagement with a conflict terrain that is no longer confined to 20th century conventions, tactically or epistemologically. Simultaneously, it must avoid the necropolitical tendency to reduce conflict space in late modernity into either high-resolution drone footage or merely the background to passive victimhood of populations-turned-targets. The omnipresence of death in late modernity –its appearance as a territorial feature, a historical resource and, importantly, a site for socio-cultural practice – ought to be the starting point of political inquiry, rather than its catastrophic conclusion.

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