Decolonizing the Sacred

The Politics of Heritage in Jerusalem

Munawar, N.A.; Nassar, I.

DOI
10.5117/HMC2025.1.001.MUNA

Publication date
2025

Document Version
Final published version

Published in
Heritage, Memory and Conflict Journal (HMC)

Amsterdam University Press

HERITAGE MEMORY AND CONFLICT JOURNAL (2025) 1-22
HTTPS://DOI.ORG/10.5117/HMC2025.1.001.MUNA

Decolonizing the Sacred: The Politics of Heritage in Jerusalem

Nour Allah Munawar[1] and Issam Nassar[2]

Abstract

This article critically examines Israel's systematic weaponization of Jerusalem's heritage and memory since 1948, analyzing how cultural practices and the past remains have been politicized to enforce settler-colonial narratives. By employing a decolonial framework, this article highlights the Palestinian and Arab grassroots heritage preservation initiatives as acts of resistance aiming to safeguard Jerusalem's heritage and memory in an attempt to counter the relentless cultural cleansing of Palestinians. Drawing upon historical research on the politics of World Heritage, this article contextualizes Israeli heritage management as part of constructing and supporting a grand narrative of Jewish historical continuity. These colonial efforts aim to foster the dominance and legitimacy of the *de facto* occupation, while systematically marginalizing the Palestinian rights, heritage and collective memory. We argue that the *de facto* Israeli authorities have systematically institutionalized cultural erasure as state policy, utilizing Jerusalem's heritage to reshape the city's narrative, assert exclusive historical claims and erase the memory and indigeneity of Palestinians. This study reveals how heritage in conflict zones becomes a terrain where colonial dominance and decolonial resistance collide in ways that profoundly impact cultural memory, historical narratives and the right to belong.

Keywords: cultural heritage, Jerusalem, memory, Palestine, UNESCO World Heritage, cultural cleansing

1 (Corresponding author)
Amsterdam School for Heritage, Memory and Material Culture (AHM)
Amsterdam Centre for Ancient Studies and Archaeology (ACASA)
University of Amsterdam (UvA), the Netherlands
https://orcid.org/0000-0002-3229-0423
2 Doha Institute for Graduate Studies, Qatar

Introduction

Universal Heritage and the Making of Nation-State

The ongoing Israeli war on Gaza Strip (October 2023–present) has placed a spotlight on the massive levels of heritage destruction, forced displacement and the deteriorating humanitarian situation in Gaza Strip. The worldwide community is closely observing the latest updates of the enduring genocide in Gaza and Palestine, while pleas and demands from leaders around the globe to halt the violence and avert further loss of life among the Palestinian population are going in vain. In the midst of the increasing violence and heritage destruction in Palestine, there have been appeals in academic circles and international forums to preserve cultural property, protect civilian communities, and reconstruct what has been devastated by the Israeli aggression (see, UNESCO 2023). Consequently, the focus of these calls has recently shifted from the ongoing violations to cultural heritage situated within the UNESCO World Heritage Site (WHS) of the Old City of Jerusalem and its Walls. The preservation of Jerusalem's cultural heritage has steadily faced severe challenges since the Israeli control of the Western part of Jerusalem in 1948 and the subsequent Israeli occupation of the West Bank in 1967, including the Eastern part of Jerusalem and Gaza (Palestine), the Golan Heights (Syria), and the Sinai desert (Egypt)[3].

Israel was declared in 1948 as a Jewish State, per its declaration of independence, and as the Zionist project was based on a vision to establish a state for the Jews of Europe who needed to be removed from continental Europe as a response to antisemitism, initially in a place outside the continent; the history of the location, which ended up being Palestine, was of little consequence to the founding fathers[4]. However, having chosen Palestine as the location of the desired state, with the country's historical significance to the Jewish tradition and belief, attempts were made to find a historical justification that ties the Zionist project with historical Palestine. Such attempts were intensified after the founding of the state, resulting in a new historical narrative that connects the current state with Jewish history. To do so, the founders sought to employ biblical narratives to present the Zionist project as historically justified, especially in light of the depopulation of Palestine from its indigenous people. In such an attempt, it was necessary in the eyes of the leaders of the new state to transform and repurpose the land's tangible and intangible heritage from its reality at the time, as largely the holy land of the Christians and the Muslims.

The State of Israel currently occupies Jerusalem, even though its population is predominantly Palestinian in the Eastern part and Israeli in the Western part. This conflict revolves around national identities and settler-colonial control, but historical narratives have consistently been employed to justify the Israeli occupation and the desire of both Palestinians and Israeli to claim Jerusalem as the capital of their states. When examining Jerusalem within the context of the enduring Israeli–Palestinian conflict, it becomes evident that the weight of historical imagination often surpasses the historical realities themselves.

Central to any discussion about Jerusalem is the recognition that it holds a unique significance as both a physical place and an idea

3 This Israeli occupation took place during the June 1967 war, which Israel calls the "Six-Day War".

4 For further discussion on the establishment of the State of Israel, see also Herzl 1989.

deeply intertwined with human experiences. Jerusalem is not just a geographical territory, but a space imbued with memories, experiences, and symbolic meanings crafted by different social groups over the long durée of history. Jerusalem's sheer density of heritage sites, historic neighborhoods, monumental buildings, religious significance and sequence of past civilizations that flourished and vanished is unparalleled. This has augmented the interests —and to some extent the greed and aggressiveness— of empires, kingdoms, and modern-day nation-states to control the city and claim stewardship of its rich antiquities and splendid heritage. Multiple historical narratives and imaginations shape the diverse meanings associated with Jerusalem, making it a compelling example of a place with multiple layers of significance. Jerusalem had been ruled by Egyptians, Assyrians, Babylonians, Persians, Romans, Byzantines, Arabs, Ottomans, and British. The Canaanites, Israelites, and Crusaders ruled it, among others. Jerusalem, and particularly its heritage, remains disputable due to the ongoing Israeli–Palestinian conflict (1948–present).

For fourteen centuries, Jerusalem's population comprised of Arabic-speaking Jews, Christians, and Muslims. However, in the present day, despite Arabic remaining the language of the Palestinian community, the ruling Israeli regime designates Hebrew as the official language and enforces its use in the Israeli-controlled parts of the city (Maqsood and Ong 2023). The process of Judaizing the city and imposing Hebrew as the official language is intertwined with Israeli settler-colonial practices concerning the physical landscape and the management of cultural heritage (Dahamshe and Mendel 2021).

Jerusalem, with the remnants of its cultural assets, now faces marginalization, redefinition, and repurposing by the occupying power. This power (Israel), having created a state founded on a vision that prioritizes the Jewish narrative alone, showcases Jerusalem as a Jewish marvel to the world, ignoring the multi-layered historical landmarks visible in its splendid walls and religious buildings[5]. Thus, the current conflict over Jerusalem encompasses not only political and territorial disputes but also a struggle surrounding historical narratives, heritage stewardship, owning the past, linguistic supremacy and the reinterpretation of Jerusalem's heritage, identity, memory and urban landscape. This complex interplay underscores the significant influence of historical imagination and its enduring consequences on how Jerusalem is perceived and treated.

Having introduced our case study, its significance and complex situation, this article presents three-tiered investigation. First, it provides a historical contextualization of how cultural heritage in Jerusalem has been, and still is, threatened and damaged in contemporary history. We start with a critical examination of the processes of Judaization and acts of cultural erasure aimed at reshaping Jerusalem's story, politicize and weaponize historic narratives, and obliterate the identity and memory of the native Palestinians. Second, the article delves into the role of the UNESCO and international community in addressing the violations affecting the status of the WHS of the Old City of Jerusalem and its Walls, highlighting how global politics, cultural diplomacy and soft power impact heritage in conflict zones. Third, the article examines decolonial participatory initiatives led by Palestinian and Arab institutes which employ modern technologies and grassroots methods to

5 For further discussion on the creation of nation state and the politicization of archaeology and historic narrative in Israel, see Greenberg and Hamilakis 2022.

preserve cultural heritage in Jerusalem and Palestine. These initiatives have the potential not only to serve as a sustainable catalyst to protect heritage but also revive contested narratives of disputed heritage by centering the perspectives and voices of displaced and local Palestinians. Using case-study-based analysis of decolonial heritage preservation projects, this study underscores the significant role these participatory efforts can play in: a) encountering and refuting the relentless Israeli ethnic cleansing of Palestinians; b) empowering communities through a profound understanding of heritage, its intricacies, and its political implications; and c) safeguarding the collective and individual memories to preserve the cultural identity Jerusalemites and Palestinians overall. By bridging decolonial practices and critical heritage studies, this article underlines how people-centered methods play a key role in reclaiming cultural heritage as a tool of community engagement, resilience and resistance.

Heritage, Decoloniality and Community Engagement

Threats and risks to cultural heritage in Jerusalem continue unabated, presenting entangled versions of the concept of "heritage at risk" which includes both tangible and intangible elements of Jerusalem's patrimony[6]. Following 1948, Israeli authorities employed heavy-handed attempts to rewrite the history of Jerusalem. This has resulted in demolishing and re-appropriating Jerusalem's heritage and memory as well as the depopulation of local inhabitants. Since the Israeli occupation of the Eastern part of Jerusalem in June 1967, Israel's settler-colonial regime has actively sought to repurpose, weaponize, and use the heritage, memory, and every tangible and intangible component of cultural assets in Jerusalem and Palestine to support its grand politicized narrative and promote a nationalistic Israeli Jewish identity. The Israeli heritage management practices have placed Jerusalem's heritage as a victim of contestation and politicization in which only the Israeli narrative has the right to be maintained, presented, and promoted while the Palestinian one needs literally a lifejacket in the hope to be safeguarded for future generations.

Amidst these violations, a growing body of academic literature places a significant emphasis on Jerusalem's heritage, art, cultural history, narratives of displacement, storytelling, photography and nostalgic memories. This scholarly work also investigates the social, political, economic, and cultural aspects of the Jerusalemites society throughout the Ottoman, British mandate, post-1948 al-Nakba and contemporary periods (Bishara 2022; de Cesari 2010, 2020; Larkin and Dumper 2009; Nassar 1997; Norris 2013; Saloul 2008, 2012; Tamari, Nassar and Sheehi 2022; Tamari 1999, 2000).

In his seminal 1935 publication, "The Story of Civilization", Will Durant dedicates the first volume to the story of the foundation of past civilizations in the Ancient Near East and named it "Our Oriental Heritage". With the spread of colonialism, the significance of heritage, antiquities and (re-)interpreting and using the past remains has notably intensified in the 19th and 20th centuries. During that period, archaeologists and orientalists, who considered themselves the stewards of heritage, started (re-)producing an idealized portrayal of the Near East as the land of the first civilizations, i.e., Sumerians, Akkadians, Babylonian, Phoenician, Aramaic, etc. (see,

6 For further discussion on heritage at risk, see Rico 2016; Holtorf 2017; Munawar 2019.

Dezhamkhooy and Papoli-Yazdi 2018). These uses of the past served to repurpose cultural assets and their embodied symbolic values to promote nationalistic identities for political ends[7].

During the 20th and 21st centuries, using the past for political ends is evident in several European contexts. This is particularly notable in instances where the Fascist, Nazi, and Communist regimes ascended to power in Italy, Germany, and the former USSR, respectively. Similarly, the utilization of cultural assets for political gains has emerged as a strategy to bolster the power and authority of postcolonial regimes in the West Asia and North Africa (WANA) region, particularly in countries like Syria and Iraq. This trend can be also observed in the context of the ongoing Russia-Ukraine war (February 2022 – present), where cultural assets are employed to legitimize acts of war and aggression (Mick 2023; Dawson 2024). These political uses of cultural heritage which involves (re-)appropriating and regulating both tangible and intangible past remains are rooted in the inherited ideology that the state or the ruling political regime is the sole curator or guardian of the society's heritage and memory (Munawar 2019).

Building on recent scholarly literature examining the politicization of cultural heritage and the strategic deployment of cultural assets —including heritage, archaeology and cultural memory— for political advantage (Greenberg and Hamilakis 2022; Kisler 2023; Meskell 2018; Munawar 2022; Plets 2023; Plets and Munawar 2024), this article investigates Israel's systematic efforts to politically appropriate and repurpose Jerusalem's cultural heritage since 1948. By engaging with decolonial approaches to heritage management (Bolin and Nkusi 2022; Chipangura 2023; Shiningayamwe 2023; Reddy and Russell 2024; Munawar 2024, forthcoming), this article adopts a decolonial framework that: a) challenges colonial knowledge production about Jerusalem's past; b) critiques top-down heritage management as an extension of state power and c) centers the voices, memories and historical narratives of indigenous Palestinians. This tripartite decolonial approach demonstrates how heritage decolonization has the potential to be implemented in occupied Jerusalem, offering both a theoretical intervention and a methodological pathway for resisting settler-colonial narratives through indigenous reclamation and community empowerment[8].

In her research on community inclusion in heritage management practices, Alhadad (2023) argues that the engagement with, and active participation of, local communities in cultural heritage management is vital not only for the empowerment of these communities but also to enhancing the management of cultural heritage. In the same vein, Disko (2012) argues that the inclusion of indigenous communities in the management of UNESCO WHS should adopt a "human rights-based approach", highlighting the function of these sites as instruments for promoting sustainability and reconciliation within societies. That in mind, the case of cultural heritage management in Jerusalem faces unprecedented direct and indirect menaces where a sovereign Palestinian state is absent and incapable to fulfill its responsibilities to curate cultural heritage, collective memory, historic narratives and national identity of the native Palestinian community. De Cesari (2020) claims that the response of the local Palestinian community to the enduring Israeli occupation

7 For further discussion on the political uses of cultural assets and cultural capital see, Munawar and Symonds 2023.

8 For further discussion of heritage decolonization, see Munawar forthcoming.

of Palestinian territories in West Bank has been crystalized in various local initiatives to protect and reclaim the Palestinian heritage. These efforts have utilized new mechanisms to safeguard the heritage, memory, narratives and identity in conflict zones.

Having established the perimeter of this research and its theoretical framework, this study aims to advance scholarship on heritage in conflict by examining how control over cultural narratives operates as a critical domain of contestation between settler-colonial projects and indigenous resistance. Through the case of Jerusalem, it demonstrates how heritage management functions as an instrument of state power—legitimizing dominant historical narratives while systematically erasing and marginalizing indigenous voices. In the following section, we offer analysis of how heritage in Jerusalem has been, and still is, used as a political tool by the Israeli authorities since the establishment of Israel in 1948. These Israeli uses of Jerusalem's heritage have been consistently manipulating the Jewish religious connection to the city's history in order to justify its political control though means that will be explained below.

Cultural Erasure and the Politics of Heritage

Since its inception, Israel focused heavily on unearthing archaeological sites as well as redefining and repurposing earlier uncovered sites and monuments. In this process, many historical sites that were connected with other faiths, cultures or earlier empires that ruled the country had to be undermined and neglected[9]. In this context, Jerusalem, though not alone, takes the lion's share in redefining its historical legacy as a historically Jewish city. By examining the politics of heritage management and the enduring attempts of Judaization of Jerusalem, this section presents examples of the continuous efforts of heritage politicization attempting to intentionally cleanse and erase the cultural identity, narratives and memories of the local Jerusalemite community.

Rewriting History Through Museum Narratives and Heritage Destruction

A visit to the History of Jerusalem Museum located inside the Old City itself in a building that has the marks of various Islamic dynasties and named nowadays as the "Tower of David" would suffice to demonstrate the extent of invention of history. Here is a building that was erected by the Mamluks (14^{th}–16^{th} centuries CE), but a tower was built on the location by the Crusaders when they ruled Jerusalem (12^{th}–13^{th} centuries CE), and it has been known as *al-Qalaa* "القلعة" (meaning "the Citadel" in Arabic) as it was used by both the Mamluks and Ottomans. However, the visitor to the museum is introduced to what appears to be purely Jewish historical narrative that makes the site, and the city, into a purely Jewish location and connects it with the rise of the State of Israel in the 20^{th} century.

In the exhibition room entitled the "Second Temple Period", a brief mention of the times of Jesus in the city appears only in passing, and the room devoted to other histories is described as Arab, Crusade, and Turkish periods, and is notably among the smallest sections of the exhibition despite the very fact that the building itself goes back to all those periods. But the museum is only one aspect of redefining and repurposing cultural heritage in Jerusalem.

In fact, more damage has been done since the occupation of the Eastern part

9 For further discussion on the politics of Israeli archaeological works in Jerusalem and Palestine, see for instance, El-Haj 1998, 2008.

of the city in 1967 to various locations and monuments. Perhaps the first known transformation, started even before the end of the Six-Day war of 1967, was the destruction of the *al-Sharaf* and *the Maghribi* (Moroccan) quarters of Jerusalem (Figure 1). Starting on June 8th of that year, Israeli bulldozers destroyed the two neighborhoods adjacent to the 'wailing wall' removing 6500 residents and tearing down 595 homes, 104 commercial establishments, 5 mosques and 4 schools. In their place, around 460 houses for Jewish use only were built in an architectural style significantly different from the rest of the city (Moqatel 2023). In the process, the 'Wailing Wall', significant to the Jews and known by them as the Western Wall "הַכּוֹתֶל הַמַּעֲרָבִי", and to the Muslims as *al-Buraq* Wall "حائط البراق" in reference to the journey taken by prophet Muhammad according to the Quranic text, has been designated as purely Jewish holy site and the right of prayer at the location was forbidden to non-Jews (Figure 2). Since then, the area, annexed to the Jewish quarter of the Old City, expanded and more destruction of evidence of other histories have been removed.

Figure 1. Distant view of the Western (al-Buraq) Wall with the Maghribi quarter in the forefront_Jerusalem, ca. 1920. Retrieved from the Library of Congress

Figure 2. The Israeli bulldozers at work destroying the Maghribi (Moroccan) Quarter in the Old City of Jerusalem on June 10-12, 1967. Credit David Rubinger-Getty Images. Retrieved from the Jerusalem Story

In the year that followed, an attempt to burn Al-Aqsa Mosque, the third holiest site of Islam, took place at the hand of an Australian tourist who wanted to eradicate Muslim presence in the city (Seitz 2005). Even though the Israeli authorities condemned the burning and declared the arson as crazy, the fact is that the very naming of Al-Aqsa Mosque was changed to become the "Temple Mount", and the various attempts to claim the place by Jewish settlers in disguise of worshipers at the site of the Temple of Solomon continues to the day of writing this paper in a very intensive manner (Aljazeera English 2023; Middle East Monitor 2023).

Judaization: From Archaeological Practices to Heritage Reappropriation

The repurposing of cultural heritage in Jerusalem extends to the names of historic monuments, places, and even neighborhoods. The politics of naming is one of the policies that Israel undertook in Jerusalem since its occupation of the Western part of Jerusalem in 1948. Neighborhoods to the west and south of the Old City, that fell to the control of Israel in that year, were renamed and changed to Hebrew names. For instance, Al-Baqaa "البقعة" neighborhood was renamed into Geulim

"גאולים" (meaning "redeemed" in Hebrew), and Talbiyeh "الطالبية" into Komemiyut "קוממיות" (meaning "sovereignty" in Hebrew). The two neighborhoods were established in the early 20th century by Palestinians who were forced out in 1948 and their homes were taken over by Israeli forces.

In the Old City and its surroundings, mosques were taken over and made into Jewish holy sites, including the mosque of Maqam Al-Nabi Daoud "مقام النبي داود" (meaning the "Tomb of Prophet David" in Arabic), that was built in the Mamluk period in 1492 by Sultan Barsbay (Litile 1999). The site in question, formerly a mosque, is now off-limits to Muslims. Over time, there has been a series of destruction of sites and building confiscation by Israeli authorities in Jerusalem, including Maqam Al-Nabi Daoud (Figure 3). One notable incident occurred in 2013, when the decorated walls of the tomb were destroyed by vandals, resulting in the removal of 17th century Ottoman period Islamic decorative art. The purpose behind this destruction was to eliminate any Muslim influence and reinforce the Jewish identity of David's Tomb.

Figure 3. Tomb of Prophet David known as (the mosque of Maqam Al-Nabi Daoud) 1878 Credit Félix. Bonfils_Retrieved from Wikiwand

At the compound of Al-Aqsa Mosque, Israeli archaeologists launched archaeological excavations shortly after the full occupation in 1967, with the aim of finding remnants of the first and second Jewish temples[10]. However, the most significant discovery during these excavations was not related to the temples but instead revealed an Umayyad administrative compound composed of eight buildings dating back to the period between 661 and 750 CE. Rather than preserving this historical discovery that enriches the diversity of Jerusalem's heritage, an archeological park named the "Davidson Centre" was constructed on the site. This center offers audio-visual presentations to tourists, highlighting the story of the first and second Jewish temples. The establishment of the Davidson Centre has raised concerns about the potential downplaying of the Umayyad historical significance in favor of emphasizing Jewish history in the area (al-Ju'beh 2019; see also The Jerusalem Archaeological Park – Davidson Center 2024).

Perhaps the most dangerous threat to Jerusalem's heritage and story undertook by Israeli authorities relates to the relentless attempts to ethnically cleanse the city from Palestinian presence through destruction of homes, land confiscation, and exclusive establishment of Jewish colonies inside and around the city. Jerusalem is closed off by a wall erected by Israel, known to the Palestinians as the Apartheid Wall and by Israel as the security fence, barring the entry of Palestinians from the rest of the West Bank into the city. This utterly preposterous act is coupled with revoking residency rights to Palestinians which represents the most crucial element in the project of Judaizing Jerusalem. Additionally, offices of Palestinian organizations in the city have been shut by

10 For further discussion on illegal excavations beneath Al-Aqsa Mosque in Jerusalem, see full State of Conservation reports presented to the UNESCO World Heritage Committee, e.g., UNESCO 2024b.

the occupation authorities, neighborhoods that are largely Palestinian have been taken over by Jewish settlers and building permits for Palestinians in the city are denied as a matter of policy.

Cultural Cleansing and Contemporary Politics

Since the Israeli occupation of the East part of Jerusalem in 1967, there have been persistent attempts to make the Old City an exclusively Jewish domain. These policies and practices, well-documented by the United Nations, Palestinian, and Israeli sources, aim to erase the historical presence and contributions of Arab inhabitants, both Muslim and Christian, as well as Jews who do not align with the Zionist project. These flagrant violations and intentional damage and threats to the historic parts of Jerusalem have drawn the attention of scholars to the importance of investigating the politicization of cultural heritage, its (re-)presentation, promotion, and reappropriation by the occupying authorities (Allen 2008; Benvenisti 1996; El-Haj 1998, 2008, 2012; Masalha 2014; Ricca 2007). The Israeli efforts to repurpose Palestinian heritage in an attempt to ethnically cleanse the rights and memory of Palestinians is apparent in the uses of intangible Palestinian heritage and introducing it as their own, e.g., the Palestinian embroidery and thobes used by the Israeli airlines El Al as dresses for flight attendants (see Farhat 2022; Shurrab 2021), and the scandalous appropriation of Palestinian embroidery and thobes during Miss Universe 2021 event held in Israel (Hasaneen 2021; Aljazeera English 2021).

Recent incidents of Zionist settlers taking over Palestinian homes in Jerusalem's neighborhoods, such as *Sheikh Jarrah* and *Silwan*, under historical claims demonstrate a consistent pattern of cultural erasure of the Palestinian heritage. The Israeli State's inaction and support through military forces add to the injustices faced by Palestinian communities. Additionally, these attempts to claim holy sites, i.e., Al-Aqsa Mosque, and confiscation of lands and homes of Palestinians have evidently led to escalated tensions and conflicts all over the Palestinian territories, including the "Flood of Al-Aqsa" events of October 7, 2023, and the subsequent Israeli genocidal war on Gaza.

More recently, the right-wing prime minister of Israel, Benjamin Netanyahu, delivered a televised press conference in September 2024 in which he presented a map that erases the occupied Palestinian West Bank (including Jerusalem) and claims it as part of Israel. Since October 7, 2023, the Israeli government, led by Netanyahu himself, has accelerated its systematic practices of culturally erasing the identity, rights and heritage of the Palestinian people. These cultural eradication practices encompass the ongoing violations to Palestinian heritage in Jerusalem (specifically on Al-Aqsa Mosque compound), calls by Israeli officials for the annexation of Palestinian territories in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, attacks by settlers and illegal seizure of Palestinian-owned lands, bulldozing homes and streets of Palestinian cities, and most importantly commencing acts of genocide in the Gaza Strip during the ongoing war on Gaza.

These acts and practices highlight that the violations to cultural assets in Jerusalem and the attempts to erase the Palestinian identity and collective memory from Jerusalem's public spaces are merely the tip of an iceberg. Despite the significance of Jerusalem to Judaism, Jerusalem cannot be exclusively Jewish, and its cultural heritage should have the capacity to include other communities, cultures and religions that rightfully claim their place in its present and past. The international community holds

the responsibility to preserve Jerusalem, its diversity, tangible and intangible heritage, social fabric and rights of local inhabitants, as an inclusive city, denounce Israeli attempts to displace native Palestinians, and maintain the significance of Jerusalem to the three monotheistic religions.

Heritage as Geopolitics

International Community, UNESCO and Heritage Stewardship

The management of cultural heritage and museum facilities in conflict zones, divided cities and occupied territories is an exceptionally intricate task. Since the establishment of UNESCO in the aftermath of the Second World War, specifically in November 1945, international community has striven to formulate and propose a plethora of guidelines and conceptual frameworks to manage cultural heritage in peace and conflict times. Nevertheless, the governance, conservation and management of cultural heritage in occupied territories and contested zones that have been, and some still are, divided due to ethnic and/or religious conflicts and/or civil wars, such as Jerusalem, Aleppo, Beirut, Belfast, Nicosia, and others, face numerous significant challenges. These challenges are visible in the short- and long-term impacts on the local communities as well as the tangible and intangible components of cultural heritage.

The 1947 United Nations partition resolution of Palestine envisaged Jerusalem as an international zone open to both Jewish and Arab states. Yet only the establishment of a Jewish state had materialized. The Old City of Jerusalem, located in the Eastern part of modern-day Jerusalem, has an exceptional value for the followers of the three monotheistic religions. Following the Six-Day war of 1967, or as it has later been labelled in the Arab literature "al-Naksa" (النكسة), and the Israeli occupation of Arab territories including the Eastern part of Jerusalem, the governance, sovereignty, and management of heritage, antiquities and monumental buildings in Jerusalem have been in a *de facto* status.

Since 1967, cultural heritage in Jerusalem has been suffering continuous biblical attempts of archaeological 'mythological' and selective excavations, tunneling, and illegal projects commenced by the occupying Israeli authorities[11]. These actions are visible in the relentless attempts to politicize and repurpose Jerusalem's cultural heritage which ultimately threaten its safety, integrity, authenticity, and the Outstanding Universal Value. It is worth noting that conducting archaeological excavations in occupied territories is legally forbidden and considered as a violation to the 1999 Second Protocol to the Hague Convention of 1954 for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict. Article 9 of the latter UNESCO protocol explicitly states that the occupying authority should acquire the consent of the responsible authority of the occupied territory before starting archaeological digs in any occupied territories. The State of Israel has signed the 1954 UNESCO convention and never joined the 1999 Second Protocol, while Palestine has signed both, the 1954 convention and the 1999 protocol (UNESCO 2024a).

Since the occupation of the Eastern part of Jerusalem, Israel implemented laws that separated the city from the rest of the West Bank by applying Israeli regulations, jurisdiction and administration to the city and its residents. In 1980, the Israeli parliament, the

11 For further discussion on mythological and selective Israeli excavations, see for instance, El-Haj 1998; Feldman 2007; Greenberg 2021.

Knesset, enacted officially the Jerusalem annexation law in which Jerusalem is "complete and united [and] is the capital of Israel" (Knesset 1980). Such law not only changes the status of the city as envisioned by the 1947 UN Partition Plan, but also to the 4th Geneva Convention of 1949 which prevents the occupying power from annexing an occupied territory, and the various UN resolutions related to the Israeli–Palestinian realities (see also, The 4th Geneva Convention 1949).

In 1981, the government of Jordan proposed to list the Old City of Jerusalem on the UNESCO World Heritage List (WHL). Following the recommendation of International Council on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS), the General Assembly of the UNESCO, held in Paris 1981, approved the inscription of the Old City of Jerusalem and its Walls on the WHL (WHC 1981). The 220 historic monuments, including the highly important religious sites, such as the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, the mosques of Al-Aqsa and the Dome of the Rock, and the Western Wall. In 1982, the UNESCO decided to add the Old City of Jerusalem and its Walls on the UNESCO WHL in Danger due to the different threats revealed in the ICOMOS examination report of 1981, such as the risks of loss of the historical authenticity and cultural significance, ascertained danger concerned with "lack of conservation policy", and the "modification of juridical status of the property diminishing the degree of its protection" (WHC 1982). In its yearly report on the state of conservation of cultural heritage in Jerusalem, UNESCO keeps urging the State of Israel to halt its violations to the UN resolutions as well as the UNESCO conventions, and decisions (WHC 2023).

Politics of Cultural Diplomacy

Besides the violations to the international community's decisions concerned with the respect of the status of the WHS of the Old City of Jerusalem and its Walls and the endless violence taking place in Jerusalem, and in-between its historic districts, political tensions escalated and extended to cultural diplomacy in international arenas. Following the UNESCO's admission and official recognition of Palestine as a member state in 2011 and the criticism of UNESCO to the Israeli occupation of the Eastern part of Jerusalem, Israel along the United States of America formally withdrew from the UNESCO in 2017 and accused the organization with the "anti-Israel bias" (Beaumont 2017a; Kersel and Luke 2012; Meskell 2013; 2015). The UNESCO's recognition of the membership of Palestine has resulted in the US financial withdrawal from the UNESCO budget ($60 million representing 22% of UNESCO's budget) and placed the organization in a fiscal crisis. As Munawar and Symonds (2023) argued, the politicization of soft power and cultural diplomacy to enforce particular decisions on national and / or international levels (the directives of UN organizations) is part of the ways in which modern nation-states and political regimes use cultural capital for political gains and legitimization of state aggression.

On December 6th, 2017, Donald J. Trump, the 45th and 47th president of the United States of America, has officially recognized Jerusalem as the 'eternal' capital of the State of Israel (AlJazeera Centre for Studies 2017; BBC 2017a; Landler 2017). The recognition decision ignited waves of rejection and condemnation by the international community, world leaders, and most importantly the Arab and Palestinian people. This unprecedented shift in the US policy has been considered as a political provocation that threatens not only decades of struggle and fight against settler colonialism and cultural cleansing of the identity and rights of indigenous inhabitants, but it established far greater risk to cultural heritage sites and monuments, multi-ethno-religious identities, memories

of Jerusalemites, Arabs, Christians, Muslims, and to the historiography of Jerusalem.

The decision of Trump's administration negates the prevailing norms of international community and specifically the UN resolutions since 1967 that aim to maintain neutrality and avoid bias when it comes to establishing or transferring embassies in Jerusalem or recognizing the Holy City as a national capital of either state (Palestine or Israel). It is worth noting that Trump's decision is not brand new nor an unexpected step of the US foreign policy, rather it is an implementation of the US bill titled "Jerusalem Embassy Act of 1995" passed by the US Congress and Senate houses (US Congress 1995; Bump 2017). The 1995 bill declares that "Jerusalem [to] be recognized as the capital of the State of Israel" and that the US embassy will be transferred to Jerusalem. International community swiftly responded to the US decision with two drafts resolutions which were introduced to the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) on December 8th, 2017 (United Nations 2017a; Beaumont 2017b), and the UN General Assembly on December 21st, 2017. The UNSC resolution was vetoed by the US while the UN General Assembly resolution was passed with 128 votes in favor and 9 votes against (Aljazeera English 2017). Federica Mogherini, the European Union's former foreign policy chief (2014–2019), expressed the EU's and its 28 member states rejection of the US unilateral decision and confirmed the EU's support to the efforts aiming to respect the international consensus on Jerusalem that is based on the two-states solution which considers Jerusalem as the capital of both states (European Parliament 2017). Simultaneously, leaders regional and Arab states of Palestine, Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Türkiye, Iran, and many others have condemned and / or rejected the decision and considered it "legally null", "irresponsible", "dangerous", "death sentence for all who seek peace" and ultimately thwarts peace efforts (BBC 2017b; Chulov 2017; Heinrich 2017).

A few months later, the US recognition was followed by the relocation of the US embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem on May 14, 2018, which coincides with the 70th anniversary of the establishment of the State of Israel (Tisdall 2018; Aljazeera English 2018; BBC 2018). This unilateral act is more than a political decision or a policy implementation as it holds profound symbolic connotation that can be translated into presenting the Israeli political elite with a long-dreamt gift on the same day/eve that represents a scar in the Palestinian and Arab memory, al-Nakba of 1948. By doing so, the US endorsement of the Israeli claim of Jerusalem as its 'eternal' capital has weakened the role of US foreign policy as impartial peace mediator and hindered the peace talks of the world's most enduring conflicts, the Israeli–Palestinian conflict.

In the following section, we examine two examples that offer a decolonial participatory approach to heritage preservation in contested Jerusalem. This section highlights the importance of community engagement and collaborative efforts in protecting cultural heritage throughout times of occupation, focusing on initiatives undertaken by Palestinian and Arab NGOs and academic institutions. This underlines how the commitment of indigenous communities to fight the repurposing and selective ruination of their heritage can be seen as acts of cultural resistance that have the potential to preserve heritage in conflict zones.

Hope at the End of a Tunnel? Towards a Decolonial Participatory Heritage

Community participation in cultural heritage management has become an increasingly major topic of discussion in scholarly debates

and international forums. Over the past few years, numerous scholars have advocated for participatory approaches that emphasize the role of including local communities into cultural heritage management plans and practices, encompassing identification, presentation, preservation, promotion and reconstruction (Waterton and Watson 2013; Waterton 2014; Isakhan and Meskell 2019, 2024; Munawar and Symonds 2022; Bonnie, et al. 2023; Larkin and Rudolf 2024; Selim and Farhan 2024; Munawar forthcoming). UNESCO conventions, such as 1972 World Heritage Convention, underscore the importance of community involvement in the management of cultural heritage and encourage member states to develop innovative strategies and policies to effectively and actively engage with local communities (WHC 2024).

The participatory efforts of the indigenous community of Jerusalem transcend beyond the cultural sector; it presents a decolonial model of heritage preservation that includes various vital issues related to the rights of the local Palestinian people. These issues range from sports, human rights, community-based activities focused on Jerusalemites youth and children, fighting poverty, education, justice and equality, democracy, gender and sexual rights, scout activities, livelihoods and most importantly the culture, art, traditions and music across the Palestinian territories, and particularly in Jerusalem.

In this article, we identify about 84 local initiatives, cultural centers, theaters and NGOs that work on ground (in Jerusalem) and / or online on protecting the rights and heritage of the Jerusalemites. The significance of such decolonial people-centered approach to heritage lies in the objectives that seek to protect the cultural, historical and social fabric of the local Jerusalemite community. By taking different forms and shapes (such as citizen-led initiatives, online visibility efforts led by academic institutions, think tanks, grassroots movements and civil society organizations), efforts to protect and manage endangered heritage in Jerusalem have played a pivotal role in safeguarding, presenting, and promoting tangible and intangible cultural heritage under occupation. 22 out of the 84 creative initiatives in Jerusalem are dedicated to the preservation of cultural heritage, traditional music, art and dances, storytelling, archiving and documenting threatened Palestinian heritage, and most prominently the collection of oral history and stories of the Palestinian community in a way that presents and promotes a less-known narrative of Jerusalem. Table 1 shows the initiatives commenced by the Palestinian community to protect Jerusalem's heritage.

Table 1. List of participatory heritage initiatives working on Jerusalem. Retrieved from Jerusalem Story

Name	Fields of Activity	Location	Website
Jerusalem Story	History, Palestinian Narrative, Bios of Jerusalemites, Lexicon, Blogs	Online	https://www.jerusalemstory.com/en
African Community Society	Arts, Heritage, International/ Cultural relations	Jerusalem	https://www.annalindh-foundation.org/members/african-community-society
Alquds Fund and Endowment	Education, Culture, Economic empowerment, Community development	Jerusalem	https://www.alqudsfund.org/en/
al-Aqsa Mosque Library	Academia and Research	Jerusalem	https://aqsalibrary.org/

Name	Fields of Activity	Location	Website
Beit Surik Women's Center	Culture, Heritage, and Music	Jerusalem	https://www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=100054505028142
The Palestinian National Theatre El-Hakawati	Storytelling, intangible heritage, Palestinian Arts and Culture	Jerusalem	https://el-hakawati.org/
The Jerusalem Society for Music Teaching and Research (Edward Said National Conservatory of Music)	Intangible Heritage (Music)	Jerusalem	http://ncm.birzeit.edu/en/jerusalem-branch
Jerusalemite Youth Cultural Forum	Culture, Music, Heritage Education activities	Jerusalem	https://jycforum.wordpress.com/
Khazaaen	Archiving and Documenting of people's stories	Jerusalem	https://khazaaen.org/en
Madaa Creative Center	Heritage Preservation via Educating Youth	Jerusalem	https://www.madaasilwan.org/
Al-Ma'mal Foundation for Contemporary Art	Contemporary Art	Jerusalem	https://www.facebook.com/almamalfoundation/?ref=page_internal
Nakhleh Esheber Institute	Children Education of Culture, Art and Music of Palestine	Jerusalem	https://www.facebook.com/NakhlehEsheber/
Oushaq Arts Center Jerusalem	Folk Palestinian Dances (intangible heritage)	Jerusalem	https://www.facebook.com/Oushaqartscenter/
Palestinian Art Court – al-Hoash	Contemporary Art	Jerusalem	https://www.facebook.com/alhoashpal/
Qafilah – Moving Stage	Theater	Jerusalem	https://www.facebook.com/qafilah.theatre
Quds Art – Jerusalem	Traditional Theater (Hakawati)	Jerusalem	https://www.facebook.com/QudsArtQdsFn/?ref=page_internal
Al-Quds Association for Heritage Development	Embroidery (Palestinian Intangible Heritage on the WHL), Folk Dance	Jerusalem	https://qidph.wordpress.com/
Al-Ruwah Theatre	Theater and Performing Art	Jerusalem	https://alruwahtheatre.weebly.com/index.html
Sabreen Association for Artistic Development	Music (Intangible Heritage)	Jerusalem	https://www.sabreen.org/
Sanabel Culture and Arts Theater	Theater (Street Theater)	Jerusalem	https://www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=100054473290346
Siwar Association for Culture and Arts	Culture and Art Education	Jerusalem	https://siwar.org/
Yabous Cultural Centre	Performing Arts	Jerusalem	https://yabous.org/en/

One of those participatory initiatives is the "Jerusalem Story: The City Retold" project. This project collects and tells the stories of unexplored historic narratives of the Palestinian community in Jerusalem, particularly those people who lived in the Western part of the city and were abandoned by both the Israeli and the Palestinian leadership (Jerusalem Story 2024a). By providing open access to documentary heritage materials, i.e., photos, videos, personal stories and the oral history of the Palestinian community in Jerusalem, the Jerusalem Story project documents and preserves the tangible and intangible cultural heritage of the displaced Jerusalemite and Palestinian community.

Jerusalem Story has also a crowdsourcing aspect that allows people to share stories, experiences, displacement narratives, academic publications, essays, poems and diasporic memories about Jerusalem in a dedicated online blog, "Jerusalem Notebook", to preserve and present an overlooked angle of Jerusalem's heritage. In their aim to re-tell and re-shape the narrative of a contested place, Jerusalem Story offers a remarkable Lexicon of the terminology, words, names of places, memories, and their meanings that are used to describe Jerusalem's places, stories, and history. This significant part of participatory practices to heritage management reveals the power of words that have "nuanced shades of meanings" in creating and promoting narratives of complex places in conflict zones (Jerusalem Story 2024b).

Similarly, the Palestinian academic community within Palestine as well as in diaspora, in collaboration with heritage NGOs, has also spent massive efforts to document and preserve threatened Palestinian heritage, memory and identity. The digital initiative of the "Interactive Encyclopedia of the Palestine Question (PALQUEST)" is a joint project that was established as part of the collaboration between the Institute for Palestine Studies and the Palestinian Museum in Birzeit, Palestine. PALQUEST offers an online platform of the history of Palestinian places and depopulated villages, biographies, academics and historical materials, i.e., photos and videos, from the end of the Ottoman period to the present time. PALQUEST encyclopedia provides an updated historical and thematic chronology that traces the history of Palestine since the beginning of Ottoman period in Palestine in 1516 until the present time.

The significance of digitized platforms, such as the Jerusalem Story and PALQUEST, underlines the need to bring together and introduce an accurate and objective Palestinian version of the history of Palestine and Jerusalem into the digital arena. Since 1948, Palestinian heritage has been politically manipulated, redefined, repurposed and later presented to the world as Israeli cultural assets. Consequently, authentic voices of the Palestinian indigenous community have been framed as victims fighting the last lab of settler colonialism and who have no effective and/or impactful cultural, political, economic, nor social institutions that can curate and preserve the rights, heritage, memory or identity of the Palestinian people.

Thus, decolonial participatory approaches to heritage management as well as initiatives of Jerusalemite community and academic and heritage institutions taking place in Jerusalem and other Palestinian territories (worldwide or online) aiming to safeguard the Palestinian patrimony, material culture, collective memory and cultural identity are not only attempts to encounter and refute the relentless Israeli attempts of Judaization and deliberate cultural cleansing, but they are acts of cultural resistance freighted with assertation of local agency, exceptional values and profound meanings.

The decolonial efforts of the local Palestinian and Jerusalem-based NGOs, academics and heritage institutions to preserve the heritage of the Jerusalemites and the Palestinians (at home and in diaspora) reveal a module of cultural resilience facing settler-colonial threats that continuously intend to cleanse the rights of native inhabitants. Through participatory and community-based initiatives, local communities have the capacity to develop a profound understanding of their heritage. These endeavors emphasize the Palestinian and Arab agency and dedication to combat the deliberate destruction of heritage in contested places. By providing local communities with an insightful perception

of the value and meaning of cultural heritage, those participatory and community-based endeavors highlight the Palestinian and Arab commitment to fight selective and intentional ruination of Palestinian heritage and to preserve the cultural identity and collective and individual memories of the Jerusalemites, the Palestinians and Arabs in general.

Conclusion

Cultural heritage is not merely buildings and monuments. It is a narrative that can be curated, materialized, re-shaped, evoked, and revived. With a pen stroke of who controls or curates it, a devil becomes the angel, a colonization becomes the independence, a lie becomes the truth, and vice versa is accurately possible. This is the case of cultural heritage is Jerusalem.

As we have shown in this paper, Jerusalem's cultural heritage has endured an array of Israeli heavy-handed attempts aimed at altering its narrative, demolishing and reclaiming its memory, and displacing its indigenous population. The continuous and blatant disregard for the preservation of cultural heritage, rights, and identity of the indigenous people of Jerusalem has significantly escalated since the occupation in 1967. This has resulted in numerous instances of forced displacement and ongoing efforts to repurpose cultural assets in the Old City of Jerusalem.

Jerusalem's abundance of historical, cultural, and spiritual significance, which encompasses several religions and nationalities, renders it a city of diversity and contention. Even with the current presence of settler-colonial policies and cultural heritage abuses and violations in Jerusalem, the community-based initiatives and decolonial participatory approaches to heritage preservation offer a glimmer of hope for the future. These heritage preservation initiatives engage with local communities by giving them a platform to express their opinions and viewpoints that are frequently marginalized in mainstream discourse.

It has been our aim in this article to demonstrate that decolonial heritage preservation efforts in Jerusalem aim not only to safeguard threatened heritage but also to cultivate a sense of cultural identity and pride among local people. These decolonial initiatives include authentic voices, empower indigenous communities and assert local agency in preserving, presenting, and transmitting cultural heritage. Furthermore, such attempts promote sustainable efforts to develop innovative cultural industries in Jerusalem, and Palestine as a whole.

By the time of writing this paper, the Israeli military apparatus persists in jeopardizing cultural heritage in Gaza, Jerusalem and all over Palestine, while the massacre and displacement of Palestinians remain relentless across the Palestinian territories. In 2025, Jerusalemites and Palestinians all over the world commemorated the 77th memory of al-Nakba, marking the massacre and forced displacement of their ancestors, with the escalating destruction and exploitation of their cultural heritage since May 1948. As Palestinians, we do believe that al-Nakba is not just a dark memory that can be actively or passively remembered and commemorated, but rather it is every moment lived and experienced by the people who were, and generally still are, severely affected by the loss of home and the right to curate their cultural heritage and historical narratives.

Funding

The first author, Nour Allah Munawar, acknowledges that this publication is part of the project "Decolonial Futures:

Heritage, Memory, and Narratives in-Making in MENA" with file number [Vl.Veni.221F.016] of the research programme NWO-Talentprogramma2022, panel Philosophy, historical sciences, and religion which is financed by the Dutch Research Council (NWO) under the grant [177220].

Competing interests

The authors have declared that no competing interests exist.

Acknowledgments

We are grateful to the anonymous reviewers for their constructive feedback, valuable comments, and insightful suggestions on the draft of this article. We also extend our thanks to the journal's editorial board, particularly Prof. Ihab Saloul and Dr. Mario Panico, for their support and assistance.

Author Biographies

Dr. Nour Allah Munawar is an archaeologist and UNESCO heritage expert, currently working as a research fellow at the University of Amsterdam (UvA), where he is the Principal Investigator of the Dutch Research Council (NWO)-funded project, *Decolonial Futures: Heritage, Memory, and Narratives in the Making in MENA*. He was recently commissioned by the UNESCO Documentary Heritage Unit to work as a researcher on the project Documentary Heritage for Intercultural Dialogue – A Case Study of AlUla, Saudi Arabia. Munawar's work bridges academia and practice, aiming to challenge colonial narratives and promote inclusive heritage practices. He has held positions at Brown University (USA), UCL-Qatar (Qatar), the University of Amsterdam (the Netherlands), and the Doha Institute for Graduate Studies (Qatar). His research and advocacy continue to shape conversations on heritage, memory, and decolonial futures in the Arab region and beyond.

Prof. Issam Nassar is Professor of History at the Doha Institute for Graduate Studies. He earned his PhD from Illinois State University, USA. He recently published the book Camera Palæstina: Photography and Displaced Histories of Palestine, co-authored with Stephen Sheehi and Salim Tamari.

References

Alhadad E F A (2023) The contribution of community involvement in heritage management: a cultural mapping project. PhD Thesis, Brandenburgische Technische Universität Cottbus-Senftenberg.

AlJazeera Centre for Studies (2017) Policy Brief: Trump's Recognition of Jerusalem as Israel's Capital: Background and Ramifications. Available at: https://studies.aljazeera.net/sites/default/files/articles/documents/2019-11/4b95a54c599a4155987f7af1b3999244_100.pdf Accessed on 24 April 2025.

Aljazeera English (2017) UN Jerusalem resolution: How each country voted. Available at: https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2017/12/21/un-jerusalem-resolution-how-each-country-voted Accessed on 24 April 2025.

Aljazeera English (2018) World leaders react to US embassy relocation to Jerusalem. available at: https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2018/5/14/world-leaders-react-to-us-embassy-relocation-to-jerusalem Accessed on 24 April 2025.

Aljazeera English (2021) Palestinian embroidery added to UNESCO cultural heritage list. available at: https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/12/16/palestinian-embroidery-

added-to-unesco-cultural-heritage-list Accessed on 24 April 2025.

Aljazeera English (2023) What's driving Israeli excavations under Al-Aqsa Mosque? Available at: https://www.aljazeera.com/program/inside-story/2023/5/22/whats-driving-israeli-excavations-under-al-aqsa-mosque Accessed on 24 April 2025.

al-Ju'beh N (2019) Archeological Excavations in Jerusalem Since 1967: From a Factory of Tora Narrative to a Factory of Settlements in Arabic. Qadaya Israeliyeh issue 73: 52-73.

Allen L (2008) Getting by the occupation: How violence became normal during the Second Palestinian Intifada. Cultural Anthropology 23.3: 453-487.

BBC (2017a) Jerusalem is Israel's capital, says Donald Trump. Available at: https://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-42259443 Accessed on 24 April 2025.

BBC (2017b) Trump's Jerusalem calls spark warnings from Arab leaders. Available at: https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-42245289 Accessed on 24 April 2025.

BBC (2018) US consulate general in Jerusalem merges with embassy. Available at: https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-47442145 Accessed on 24 April 2025.

Beaumont P (2017a) UNESCO: Israel joins US in quitting UN heritage agency over 'anti-Israel bias'. The Guardian, (October 2017a) available at: https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/oct/12/us-withdraw-unesco-december-united-nations Accessed on 24 April 2025.

Beaumont P (2017b) US outnumbered 14 to 1 as it vetoes UN vote on status of Jerusalem. The Guardian, (December 2017b) available at: https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/dec/18/us-outnumbered-14-to-1-as-it-vetoes-un-vote-on-status-of-jerusalem Accessed on 24 April 2025.

Benvenisti M (1996) City of stone: the hidden history of Jerusalem. University of California Press.

Bishara A (2022) Palestine: Matters of Truth and Justice. Hurst Publishers.

Bolin A and Nkusi D (2022) Rwandan solutions to Rwandan problems: Heritage decolonization and community engagement in Nyanza District, Rwanda. Journal of social archaeology, 22(1): 3-25.

Bonnie R, Marta L, and Suzie T (2023) Living Communities and Their Archaeologies in the Middle East. Helsinki University Press.

Bump P (2017) In 1995, Congress reached a compromise on the issue of Jerusalem. Trump is poised to end it. The Washington Post, (December 2017) available at: https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/politics/wp/2017/12/06/in-1995-congress-reached-a-compromise-on-the-issue-of-jerusalem-trump-is-poised-to-end-it/ Accessed on 24 April 2025.

Chipangura N (2023). Decolonising the archaeology of indigenous artisanal gold mining in Eastern Zimbabwe. Journal of Community Archaeology & Heritage,10(3-4): 215-232.

Chulov M (2017) 'Decades of chaos': Arab leaders condemn US decision on Jerusalem. The Guardian, (December 2017) available at: https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/dec/07/arab-leaders-condemn-us-decision-on-jerusalem-israel Accessed on 24 April 2025.

Dahamshe A, and Yonatan M (2021) The Language of Jewish Nationalism: Street Signs and Linguistic Landscape in the Old City of Jerusalem. Jerusalem Quarterly 87: 12-37

Dawson M (2024) War and the Historic Environment: The Effect of Conflict from Front Line Ukraine to Historic Namibia. Taylor & Francis.

De Cesari C (2010) Creative heritage: Palestinian heritage NGOs and defiant arts of government. American Anthropologist, 112(4): 625-637.

De Cesari C (2020) Heritage and the Cultural Struggle for Palestine. Stanford University Press.

Dezhamkhooy M and Papoli-Yazdi L (2018) The politics of the past: The representation of the ancient empires by Iran's modern states. Archaeopress Publishing Ltd: Oxford.

Disko S (2012) World Heritage sites and indigenous communities: the importance of adopting a human rights-based approach. In Community Development through World Heritage, Albert, M.-T., Richon, M., Viñals, MJ, Witcomb, A., (eds): 16-26.

Durant W (1935) The Story of Civilization: Our Oriental Heritage. New York: Simon & Schuster.

El-Haj N (1998) Translating truths: Nationalism, the practice of archaeology, and the remaking of past and present in contemporary Jerusalem. American Ethnologist, 25(2): 166-188.

El-Haj N (2008) Facts on the ground: Archaeological practice and territorial self-fashioning in Israeli society. University of Chicago Press.

El-Haj N (2012) The genealogical science: The search for Jewish origins and the politics of epistemology. University of Chicago Press.

European Parliament (2017) At Glance: US recognition of Jerusalem as capital of Israel. (December 2017). Available at: https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/ATAG/2017/614636/EPRS_ATA(2017)614636_EN.pdf Accessed on 24 April 2025.

Farhat R (2022) Countering Dispossession: For Palestinians in the Diaspora, Maintaining Cultural Identity is a Means of Resistance. Master of Arts Thesis submitted to the Craig Newmark Graduate School of Journalism, the City University of New York.

Feldman J (2007) Constructing a shared Bible Land: Jewish Israeli guiding performances for Protestant pilgrims. American Ethnologist 34, no. 2: 351-374.

Greenberg R (2021) Pompeo in Silwan: Judeo-Christian Nationalism, Kitsch, and Empire in Ancient Jerusalem. Forum Kritische Archäologie. Vol. 10: 55-66

Greenberg R and Hamilakis Y (2022) Archaeology, Nation and Race. Cambridge University Press,

Hasaneen M (2021) Palestinians decry 'cultural theft' as Miss Universe contestants wear Bedouin clothes. Al-monitor (December 2021). Available at: https://www.al-monitor.com/originals/2021/12/palestinians-decry-cultural-theft-miss-universe-contestants-wear-bedouin-clothes Accessed on 24 April 2025.

Heinrich M (2017) Arabs, Europe, U.N. reject Trump's recognition of Jerusalem as Israeli capital. Reuters, (December, 2017) available at: https://www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-trump-israel-jerusalem-reaction-idUSKBN1E0312 Accessed on 24 April 2025.

Herzl T (1989) The Jewish State. Mineola, New York: Dover Publications, revised edition.

Holtorf C (2017) The Heritage of Rupture: [Review of Patina: A Profane Archaeology. Shannon Lee Dawdy, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago, IL, 2016 & Constructing Destruction: Heritage Narratives in the Tsunami City. Trinidad Rico, Routledge, New York, NY, 2016], Historical Archaeology 51.2: 302–304.

Isakhan B and Meskell L (2019) UNESCO's project to 'Revive the Spirit of Mosul': Iraqi and Syrian opinion on heritage reconstruction after the Islamic State. International journal of heritage studies 25.11: 1189-1204.

Isakhan B and Meskell L (2024) Local perspectives on heritage reconstruction after conflict: a public opinion survey of Aleppo. International Journal of Heritage Studies 30.7: 821-839.

Jerusalem Story (2024a) available at: https://www.jerusalemstory.com/en/about/about-jerusalem-story Accessed on 24 April 2025.

Jerusalem Story (2024b) available at: https://www.jerusalemstory.com/en/lexicon Accessed on 24 April 2025.

Kisler R (2023) The political ideology underlying Israel's national cultural heritage policy. International Journal of Cultural Policy: 1-14.

Knesset (1980) Basic Law: Jerusalem, Capital of Israel, Laws of the State of Israel, no. 980, 5 August 1980. Available at: https://natlex.ilo.org/dyn/natlex2/natlex2/files/download/86610/ISR86610.pdf Accessed on 24 April 2025.

Kersel M and Christina L (2012) A Crack in the Diplomatic Armor: The United States and the Palestinian Authority's Bid for UNESCO Recognition. Journal of Field Archaeology 37 (2): 143–44.

Landler M (2017) Trump Recognizes Jerusalem as Israel's Capital and Orders U.S. Embassy to Move. New York Times, available at: https://www.nytimes.com/2017/12/06/world/middleeast/trump-jerusalem-israel-capital.html Accessed on 24 April 2025.

Larkin C and Dumper M (2009) UNESCO and Jerusalem: Constraints, challenges and opportunities. Jerusalem Quarterly, 39: 16-28.

Larkin C and Rudolf I (2024) Iraqi heritage restoration, grassroots interventions and post-conflict recovery: reflections from Mosul. Journal of Social Archaeology 24.1: 33-57.

Litile D P (1999) Communal strife in late Mamlūk Jerusalem. Islamic Law and Society 6.1: 69-96.

Maqsood A and Ong A (2023) Language Is a Powerful Weapon in the Israel-Palestine Conflict. The New Lines Magazine, available at: https://newlinesmag.com/argument/language-is-a-powerful-weapon-in-the-israel-palestine-conflict/ Accessed on 24 April 2025.

Masalha N (2014) The Zionist Bible: Biblical precedent, colonialism and the erasure of memory. Routledge: New York.

Meskell L (2013) UNESCO's World Heritage Convention at 40: Challenging the Economic and Political Order of International Heritage Conservation. Current Anthropology 54 (4): 483-494.

Meskell L (2015) Gridlock: UNESCO, global conflict and failed ambitions. World Archaeology, Vol. 47(2): 225-238.

Meskell L (2018) A future in ruins: UNESCO, world heritage, and the dream of peace. Oxford University Press.

Mick C (2023) The Fight for the Past: Contested Heritage and the Russian Invasion of Ukraine. The Historic Environment: Policy & Practice 14.2: 135-153.

Middle East Monitor (2023). Israeli excavations and blocking of restoration eat away at the fabric of Al-Aqsa Mosque. Available at: https://www.middleeastmonitor.com/20230223-israeli-excavations-and-blocking-of-restoration-eat-away-at-the-fabric-of-al-aqsa-mosque/ Accessed on 24 April 2025.

Moqatel. (2023). Jerusalem: Politically, Historically and Religiously. The Sixth Chapter: The strategy of Judaization and the Israeli takeover of Jerusalem. Available at: http://www.moqatel.com/openshare/Behoth/Siasia21/AlKods/sec07.doc_cvt.htm Accessed on 24 April 2025.

Munawar N A and Symonds J (2022) Post-Conflict reconstruction, forced migration & community engagement: the case of Aleppo, Syria. International Journal of Heritage Studies 28.9: 1017-1035.

Munawar N A and Symonds J (2023). Empires of Lies? The Political Uses of Cultural Heritage in War. The Historic Environment: Policy & Practice, Vol 14.3: 308-325.

Munawar N A (2019) Competing heritage: Curating the post-conflict heritage of Roman Syria. Bulletin of the Institute of Classical Studies, 62(1): 142-165.

Munawar N A (2022) Reconstructing narratives: The politics of heritage in contemporary Syria. Journal of Social Archaeology 22.2: 172-190.

Munawar N A (2024) Time to decolonise: 'If not now', then when? Journal of Social Archaeology, 24(1): 3-12.

Munawar N A (Forthcoming). Heritage Decolonisation: Rethinking Reconstruction and Community Engagement in Post-Assad Syria. Contemporary Levant - (Under Review).

Nassar I (1997) Photographing Jerusalem: the image of the city in nineteenth century photography. Columbia University Press.

Norris J (2013) Land of progress: Palestine in the age of colonial development, 1905-1948. Oxford University Press: Oxford.

Plets G and Munawar N A (2024) Russia in Palmyra: Contextualizing the Kremlin's Post-Conflict Heritage Rehabilitation Efforts. Journal of Eastern Mediterranean Archaeology and Heritage Studies 12 (1): 63–78.

Plets G (2023). Heritage Statecraft and Corporate Power: Altai Activism in Post-Soviet Siberia. Taylor & Francis.

Reddy K L and Russell T (2024). Decolonising archaeology in South Africa: two decades after the National Heritage Resources Act of 1999. Journal of Social Archaeology, 24(2): 171-196.

Ricca S (2007) Reinventing Jerusalem: Israel's reconstruction of the Jewish Quarter after 1967. I.B. Tauris: London, New York.

Rico T (2016) Constructing Destruction: Heritage Narratives in the Tsunami City. Routledge: New York and London.

Selim G and Sabeeh L F (2024) Reactivating voices of the youth in safeguarding cultural heritage in Iraq: the challenges and tools. Journal of Social Archaeology 24-1: 58-78.

Saloul I (2008) 'Performative Narrativity': Palestinian Identity and the Performance of Catastrophe. Cultural analysis 7.1: 5-39.

Saloul I (2012) Catastrophe and exile in the modern Palestinian imagination: Telling memories. Springer.

Seitz C (2005) Putting out Jerusalem's Fires-Civil defense under Jordan and Israel. Jerusalem Quarterly 24: 6-12.

Shiningayamwe A S M (2023) Decolonizing heritage management systems: new directions in digital heritage management from Namibia. Conservation and Management of Archaeological Sites, 25(4-6): 107-127.

Shurrab H (2021) The Palestinian thobe: A creative expression of national identity. TRT World (December 2021), available at: https://www.trtworld.com/magazine/the-palestinian-thobe-a-creative-expression-of-national-identity-57082 accessed on 24 April 2025

Tamari S (1999) Jerusalem 1948: The Arab Neighborhoods and their Fate in the War. Institute of Jerusalem Studies: Jerusalem.

Tamari S (2000) Jerusalem's Ottoman modernity: the times and lives of Wasif Jawhariyyeh. Jerusalem Quarterly, (9): 5–27.

Tamari S, Nassar I and Sheehi S (2022) Camera Palaestina: Photography and Displaced Histories of Palestine. University of California Press.

The 4th Geneva Convention (1949) IV Geneva Convention Relative to The Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War of 12 August 1949. Available at: https://www.un.org/en/genocideprevention/documents/atrocity-crimes/Doc.33_GC-IV-EN.pdf Accessed on 24 April 2025.

The Jerusalem Archaeological Park – Davidson Center (2024) Available at: http://www.arch-park.org.il/index.asp Accessed on 24 April 2025.

Tisdall S (2018) Death, division and denial as US embassy opens in Jerusalem. The Guardian, (May 2018) available at: https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/may/14/death-division-and-denial-as-us-embassy-opens-in-jerusalem Accessed on 24 April 2025.

UNESCO (2023). Impact and consequences of the current situation in the Gaza Strip/Palestine in all aspects of UNESCO's mandate: draft resolution. UNESCO. General Conference, 42nd, 2023. Paris: UNESCO. Available at: https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000387432 Accessed on 24 April 2025.

UNESCO (2024a) Second Protocol to the Hague Convention of 1954 for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict. Paris: UNESCO. Available at: https://www.unesco.org/en/legal-affairs/second-protocol-hague-convention-1954-protection-cultural-

property-event-armed-conflict Accessed on 24 April 2025.

UNESCO (2024b) Old City of Jerusalem and its Walls (site proposed by Jordan) (C 148 rev), The World Heritage Committee – 46th session of the Committee (46 COM). Paris: UNESCO. Available at: https://whc.unesco.org/en/decisions/8487 Accessed on 24 April 2025.

United Nations (2017a) Middle East: Security Council fails to adopt resolution on Jerusalem. Available at: https://news.un.org/en/story/2017/12/639772-middle-east-security-council-fails-adopt-resolution-jerusalem Accessed on 24 April 2025.

United Nations (2017b) General Assembly Overwhelmingly Adopts Resolution Asking Nations Not to Locate Diplomatic Missions in Jerusalem. Available at: https://press.un.org/en/2017/ga11995.doc.htm Accessed on 24 April 2025.

US Congress (1995) S.1322 – Jerusalem Embassy Act of 1995. Available at: https://www.congress.gov/bill/104th-congress/senate-bill/1322 Accessed on 24 April 2025.

Waterton E and Watson S (2013) Heritage and community engagement: Collaboration or contestation? Routledge.

Waterton E (2014) Heritage and community engagement. In The ethics of cultural heritage, Ireland, T., & Schofield, J. eds. (2014): 53-67. New York, NY: Springer New York.

WHC (World Heritage Committee) (1981) Decision 1 EXT.COM IV.11/14: Nomination of The Old City of Jerusalem and its Walls on the World Heritage List. Available at: https://whc.unesco.org/en/decisions/8040/ Accessed on 24 April 2025.

WHC (World Heritage Committee) (1982) Decision 6 COM X.28-35: Nomination of the "Old City of Jerusalem and its Walls" to the list of World Heritage in danger. Available at: https://whc.unesco.org/en/decisions/5284 Accessed on 24 April 2025.

WHC (World Heritage Committee) (2023) UNESCO Documents on the Old City of Jerusalem and its Walls. Available at: https://whc.unesco.org/en/list/148/documents/ Accessed on 24 April 2025.

WHC (World Heritage Committee) (2024) UNESCO 1972 World Heritage Convention. Available at: https://whc.unesco.org/en/convention/ Accessed on 24 April 2025.