Spatial Metamorphoses: Viewing the Western Wall in Personal Stories

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1 Introduction

Personal stories relating to the past are often rooted in the present and may sustain visions of the future. In the following essay, the concept of vision will be elaborated in both senses: as the concrete praxis of seeing and the conceptual process of creating a wider perception of its cultural and ideological role. More than half a century after the June 1967 war, our research project, focusing on memory and narration, seeks to capture the intermeshing of major political events with highly personal experiences of individuals whose lives were dramatically influenced by these occurrences. Their distinctive voices open a vista to an array of images, ideas and sentiments.

In-depth, open-ended and flexible interviews were conducted mainly with residents of West Jerusalem who have memories of the Six-Day War1 as adults, adolescents or children. Beyond the individual stories, one can clearly identify recurring moments and locations, as well as terms and idioms used to grasp and communicate them, that are shared by the majority of the interviewees. With this, one finds a powerful confluence of specific ‘moments’ in which history is made tangible and subject to processing by means of individual narratives. The interviewees point to and

1 This paper focuses on personal stories of Jewish Israelis. In line with their frame of reference, I will use the Israeli name given to this war. On the debate over the name of the war and the decision to call it the “Six-Day War,” see Segev (2007: 450–451).

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interpret events that imprinted themselves in personal and collective experience and set important markers for how the ensuing years and decades would unfold. The study focuses on the unanticipated changing scenery of Jerusalem that emerged repeatedly in their stories, and the continuous, recurring interest in the memories of the first days following the capture of the Old City. Rich in vocabulary and emotional spectrum, these personal stories illuminate the various meanings associated with the events that transpired in the Holy City of Jerusalem, especially the Old City inside the walls. In their stories, people spoke of their confrontation with an unimagined physical, emotional and even spiritual transformation. This unique combination gave rise to the present article.

Most of the stories describe situations and feelings that seem to dwell between dream and reality. The master image dominating the plethora of related expressions is unequivocally the Western Wall. The wealth of examples, with their tendency to mix times and sentiments, required selection and organization that was found to be especially challenging. The interviewees return by means of memory – in many cases, as revealed to us, for the first time – to highly charged emotional events. These events are related through the perspective of more than fifty years of both personal and national life that add complex and variant contexts to the memories. Although, chronologically, the concrete focus is the days immediately following the war, and despite the fact that the salient emphasis of the stories is a formative memory of the interviewees’ encounter with the Western Wall, those memories tend to mesh together time, space and, above all, past and present sentiments. This resulting tension is expressed in each of the individual stories as well as in my own difficulty in attempting to interpret the fleeting experiences described. Thus, they proved to be challenging both for the interviewees themselves and for me, as the author, aiming to center this article around an organizing axis. These challenges are reflected in the interview excerpts presented, and will be addressed again in the Discussion section.

Such expressions, always accompanied by overwhelming sentiments, were recalled vividly and tangibly in relation to concrete images, as they continue to be sustained throughout the subsequent passage of time. The Western Wall was an outstanding image within this context. This ancient stone wall, the remains of the Second Jewish Temple and a reminder of its destruction, appears prominently in the personal stories we heard.²

² The Wall’s authenticity is validated by tradition as well as archaeological research. It dates from the 2nd century BC, with its upper sections added at later periods. On the story in Lamentations Rabbah 1 of the negotiation between Vespasian, about to conquer Jerusalem and destroy the Temple and R. Yohannan b. Zakkai, which resulted in the remaining Western rampart, see Hasan-Rokem (2000: 170, 183–187). Storper-Perez and Goldberg (1994) in their ethnographic study of the Western Wall state that “the Western Wall, with its dense interweaving of religious and national significations, has undoubtedly become the central Israeli shrine since the 1967 war which brought all of Jerusalem under Israeli rule.” (Storper-Perez and Goldberg 1994: 310).
The overriding centrality of this site inspired me to relate to it as the war’s master-image for Jewish interviewees. Its imposing concreteness became the generator for an outpouring of historical and religious Jewish yearnings.

A pivotal element of this capacity is based on Jewish traditions, which bestow a historical-religious memory to the stone wall itself, charging it with vivid sentiments that mesh Divinity and the Jewish people. This confluence is poetically articulated in the song *The Wall* (*Ha-Kotel*), that infuses ancient stones with fervent emotions. Written within hours of the capture of the Old City, still within the days of the war, the now iconic song is a powerful expression of the reciprocity mentioned above, with its refrain: “The Kotel, moss and sadness; the Kotel, lead and blood // There are people with a heart of stone; and there are stones with a human heart.”

A scrutiny of these perceptions provides a potent lens for examining nuances in relation to the war and its consequences. Perceived in diverse terms among groups and individuals, the Gordian knot between this stone wall and the Six-Day War appears repeatedly in the stories, marking it as a loaded object that captures both unity and diversity between groups and individuals regarding the days of the war and its ramifications.

## 2 The Wailing Wall as an Object of Multiple Memories

“If I forget thee, O Jerusalem […].” (Psalms 137: 5)

The Western Wall (in Hebrew: *HaKotel HaMa'aravi* or just *HaKotel*, The Wall) is the limestone wall constituting the western border of Haram esh-Sharif, or the Temple Mount. The Wall is considered to be the single standing surviving remnant – one of the four retaining walls – of the Second Jewish Temple complex originally built by Herod the Great in 516 BC, and destroyed by the Roman Emperor Titus in 70 AD.

The Wall is known also as the “Wailing Wall,” due to centuries-long Jewish pilgrimages accompanied by folk customs, such as crying at the Wall, and tearing one’s clothes upon arrival in mourning regarding the destruction of the Temple and loss of national sovereignty. Other popular customs are related to its stature as an *axis mundi*, a site of penitence. This included the writing of pleas on the stones which was later adjusted to writing pleas on paper notes, inserting them between the stones and

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3 For the story of this well-known Israeli song – created by Yossi Gamzu (words) and Dubi Zeltser (lyrics) after getting to the Wall with the paratroopers in the Six-Day War, see the (Hebrew) interview with Gamzu: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qjJf4IeH-3g (accessed June 11, 2020). The refrain, emphasizing human characteristics and emotions embedded in the stones of the Wall, is based on an article entitled “*Mei’achar Kotleinu*” (Behind Our Wall) written by Rabbi Tzvi Yehudah Kook in 1937, evoking God’s constant presence at the Western Wall. For Kook’s influential thought, see, *inter alia*, Aran (1988, 1997), Bokser (2006) and Ish-Shalom (1993). Also see: http://www.israelnationalnews.com/Articles/Article.aspx/16934 (accessed June 11, 2020).
into their cracks. Moreover, in light of the ancient tradition that “the Shekinah has never left the Western Wall,” national dreams for the future were also embedded.

Long considered to be the most sacred site where Jews were permitted to pray until 1948 when it came under Jordanian rule, Jews visited and prayed in the narrow area next to the Wall, and images of this rather intimate place were well-known throughout the Jewish world.

Figure 1: Wall of the Jews on Friday, 1938. (Lenkin Family Collection of Photography at the University of Pennsylvania Library)

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5 Shemot Rabbah 2: 2. Shekinah appears in rabbinic literature (Midrash Tanhuma) to represent the divine presence of God. The Hebrew word means ‘dwellings,’ denoting the presence or setting of God.
6 The term “Wailing Wall” was used mainly in English beginning in the 19th century. See, for example, Bonar (1866). For Jewish traditions and folktales about the Western Wall, see Hasan-Rokem (2000), Noy (1983) and Vilnay (2003). On Jewish folk-customs related to the Western Wall see Lewinsky (2007) and Storper-Perez and Goldberg (1994).
7 See Löfgren, Barde and Van Kempen (1930) for the Report of the Commission appointed by His Majesty’s Government in the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, with the approval of the Council of the League of Nations, to determine the rights and claims of Moslems and Jews in connection with the Western or Wailing Wall at Jerusalem (UNISPAL doc A/7057-S/8427, February 23, 1968). Jewish attachment to the Wall, rendered with heart-touching pathos that aligns seeing with feeling, glorifies the unity of Jewish longing, and depicts the Wall as a reservoir of tears and sighs, is portrayed by Zalman Shazar, years later appointed the third President of the State of Israel, who visited the Western Wall for the first time in 1911: “You will go down through the narrow alleys of ancient Jerusalem and arrive at the Wall and stand there. Then you will not only see with your eyes but you will also feel with your entire being the single eternity in our past […] And when your feet enter the courtyard of the Wall, here you feel and experience the re-weaving of your soul into the eternal fabric of 2,000 years […] Into the space at this remnant of the Wall the sighs from all the ends of the earth and all eras penetrate […] The Wall does not differentiate between lands and eras. The tears have all flowed from the hearts of one people, they have all come from one source and they will all pray to One.” The English translation appears in Ofer Aderet’s paper, “Prayers, Notes and Controversy: How a Wall Became the Western Wall” (Haaretz, May 14, 2013; https://www.haaretz.com/jewish/.premium-how-just-a-wall-became-the-western-wall-1.5242783; accessed May 25, 2020).
Figure 2: Praying at the Western Wall, The Old City, Jerusalem 1925–1930 (Shoshana Halevi Album, Yad Ben Zvi Collection)

Figure 3: Praying at the Western Wall, The Old City, Jerusalem 1925–1930 (Shoshana Halevi Album, Yad Ben Zvi Collection)

Figure 4: The Western Wall, Kotel Hama’aravi. (Postcard, unknown photographer, Ben-Zion Kahana’s Album 1920–1940, Yad Ben Zvi Collection)

Figure 5: Eliyahu Brothers publication, 1900–1920. (Ora Raanan Album, Yad Ben Zvi Collection)
The Wall is also sacred to Islam and known as the Buraq Wall (الْحَائِط ٱلْبُرَاق, Hā’it al-Burāq), believed to be the site where Prophet Muhammad tied his flying horse, al-Buraq, on his night journey to Jerusalem before ascending to heaven. Before the Six-Day War, the Wall was rooted in a 3.6-meter-wide alley, which bordered the walls of the Mughrabi quarter houses directly. This simple neighborhood, home to descendants of Muslim immigrants from North Africa, sprawled between the Jewish Quarter situated above this neighborhood and the alley in front of the Western Wall. Due to this positioning, there was no perspective that enabled one to take in the entire expanse of the Wall (see Figures 6 and 7).

Figure 6: The Mughrabi neighborhood and Western Wall, 1952. (National Photo Collection)
Cease-fire lines following the 1948 War divided Jerusalem between Jordan and Israel, leaving the Western Wall under Jordanian rule. Although Jews were given free worship access to the Western Wall according to the official cease-fire agreements between Jordan and Israel, this right was never activated (Golani 1998). As a result, Jews were banned from praying at the Wall (Bar 2008: 2). In many of the personal stories we heard, people describe specific locations in West Jerusalem to which they would go in order to get a distant and very partial glimpse of the Western Wall in the period from 1948 to 1967. This brief and limited peek in the direction of the Wall was cherished and sought after not only because actual touching was blocked but also due to the centrality of vision in the long-established traditions related to the Western Wall.

The Six-Day War broke out on Monday morning, and East Jerusalem was captured on Wednesday, two days into the war. The most famous victory exclamation was that uttered by Colonel Mordechai (Motta) Gur, who commanded the 55th Paratroop Reserve Brigade that conquered the Old City. His proclamation, “Har HaBayit BeYadeinu” (The Temple Mount is in our hands!), broadcast live, remains to this day an emotional peak, marking the ‘redemption’ of the Western Wall. Soon after, the army’s Chief Rabbi blew the shofar — the traditional Jewish ram’s horn and

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8 Blowing a ram’s horn (known in Hebrew as shofar) is mentioned in the Hebrew Bible in various contexts, including major ‘national’ events and purposes, such as in the revelation on Mt. Sinai or during the conquest of Jericho by Joshua. Further associations include the blowing of the shofar on Rosh
Israeli soldiers were documented crying in the narrow corridor at the foot of the Wall (see Figures 8 and 9).

![Figure 8: Rabbi Goren holding a Torah Scroll with Paratroopers at the Wall. Photo: Micha Bar-Am, Bamachane (IDF Archive, Ministry of Defense)](image_url)

This specific moment when Israel Radio broadcasted the dramatic announcement “Har HaBayit BeYadeinu,” marked by Gur’s excited voice repeating it twice as if to validate this astonishing realization, was reiterated repeatedly in the personal stories we heard, shaping that historic moment of the Israeli soldiers’ physical arrival at the Western Wall with images of emotional attachment – an ecstatic mixture of touching, praying, dancing and bursting into tears. The image of crying soldiers at the Western Wall became the most powerful trope of the Six-Day War and found expression in multiple formats. With this, the tears of loss and separation associated with the Wall were replaced with tears of joy and reunion.

Hashana (New Year) to signify the idea of a new beginning. It is also linked to the binding of Isaac on Mt. Moriah (associated with the later Temple Mount). Due to its symbolic and sentimental meaning, the British Mandate, following the Arab riots of 1929, published a prohibition according to which Jews were forbidden to blow a shofar in front of the Western Wall. However, each year, especially on Yom Kippur, smuggling shofars and blowing them in front of the Wall became a defiant national practice.
3  The Imagined Temple Meets the Wall of Reality

“Whoever mourns Jerusalem merits and sees her joy.” (Ta’anit 30: 2)

The flavor of the first encounter of Israeli soldiers with the Wall is vividly portrayed by Teveth, who wrote,

[Generals] Bar-Lev and Narkiss and the rabbis headed by Rabbi Goren found the narrow plaza of the Western Wall crowded with soldiers emotionally overloaded, some of whom kissed the stones of the Wall, some of them who hugged them, while others cried like children. […] The shofar blow increased the heartbeat; the sounds of singing, shouting, praying and blowing the shofar were intertwined. (Teveth 1969: 33)

Haim, one of the soldiers arriving at the Wall recalls:

[I was one of] a mass of dusty, tired soldiers, all marching in one direction. Religious or non-religious, everyone wanted to arrive at the Wall, to touch the stones that we had yearned for over so many years […] The moment of encountering the Wall was a moment of enormous exhilaration. A dream come true …everyone around was crying.

Figure 9: June 7, 1967 Crying Paratroopers at the Western Wall (photo: David Rubinger. National Photo Collection)

9 See Gurevitch and Aran (1994: 148–149) on the crying paratroopers at the Wall and its symbolic “reunification of Israeli and Jew, the ‘Jewish’ return of the Israeli to the sacred place of the Israelite, which has become in the diasporic era the symbol of Jewish yearning. […] However, even this moment of returning to the place with its high sacredness did not escape the ambivalence we speak of,” as the Wall is not the Temple – and it is always the Temple and outside of it. Thus, they conclude, it condenses historical and religious meanings but remains utterly earthy.
Yitshak Yifat, who is remembered as one of the three soldiers in the famous photograph of the paratroopers reaching the Wall (see Figure 9 above),\textsuperscript{10} recalls these initial moments in an interview marking 50 years since the War:

Here we were, at the place that the people of Israel had waited more than two thousand years to return to.\textsuperscript{11} This can’t be underestimated! […] We, the paratroopers, had just completed a difficult face-to-face battle at Ammunition Hill. After that in the morning of June 7, we had conquered the Augusta Victoria\textsuperscript{12} in a battle that was not so wonderful, the brigade commander, Colonel Motta Gur, ordered us to approach the Old City. We then passed through the Lions’ Gate and entered the Temple Mount plaza. There was a narrow gate at the southeastern side. Through this we reached the Western Wall. When I arrived, the Mughrabi quarter was almost leaning against it. The sight of the huge wall with the enormous stones was very impressive. Seeing this, I recalled my grandfather, who was a religious man with a thick beard, and I felt like a link in a chain of continuity from Judah the Maccabee, from Shimon Bar Kokhba and from Rabbi Yehuda Halevi, who was trampled by a horse nearby (according to a legend). We were overwhelmed with indescribable joy. Here we were, serving the Western Wall on a silver platter to the Jewish people.\textsuperscript{13}

The accounts overflow with emotions in exuberant phraseology – aroused at the actual sight of the Wall. They incorporate dreaming, longing and crying as well as continuity with national and personal ‘memories.’ Listening to these stories, one is struck by the extent to which the imagination was stimulated by the site. The crying soldiers, wrapped in prayer shawls next to a rabbi blowing the shofar in front of the Wall reinforced the coalescence of religious, historical and emerging national sentiments.

\textsuperscript{10} This photo showing Israeli paratroopers in front of the Western Wall (from left: Zion Karasenti, Yitzhak Yifat and Haim Oshri) was taken by David Rubinger right after the conquest of Old City and the arrival at the Western Wall. The sheer fact that there were photographers there at these moments is, of course, a revealing of future intentions. This topic, however, lies beyond the scope of the present study. Yitshak Yifat is the soldier in the center, holding his helmet.

\textsuperscript{11} Until 1948, access to the Wall was permitted to both Jews and Muslim and made possible under the British Mandate. Thus, the underlying meaning here is that for two thousand years the people of Israel waited to have sovereignty over the Wall.

\textsuperscript{12} Augusta Victoria is an Evangelical Lutheran church-hospital compound built in the beginning of the Twentieth Century on the southern part of the Mount of Olives in East Jerusalem.

\textsuperscript{13} See Bar-On, published May 31, 2017, in Ma’ariv (in Hebrew): https://www.maariv.co.il/news/military/Article-586305 (accessed May 3, 2020). His wordings seem to echo a sentiment also found in the Hebrew lyrics titled “The Paratroopers Cry,” written by Haim Hefer following the Six-Day war, in which the Wall now sees the paratroopers and in the past, Rabbi Yehuda Halevi: “This wall has heard many prayers/This wall has seen the fall of many other walls/This wall has felt the touch of mourning women/This wall has felt petitions lodged between its stones/This wall saw Rabbi Yehuda Halevi trampled before it/This wall has seen Caesars rise and fall/But this wall had never seen paratroopers cry.” Notice the human senses attributed to the Western Wall.
Another soldier whom we interviewed, M.N., testifies to and even self-reflects on this potential. As a member of a unit waiting to enter the Old City after it was conquered, M.N. and other soldiers were sleeping outside the Dung Gate, only a short distance from the Temple Mount and the Wall. On Thursday, June 9, he organized a group of approximately ten soldiers to go to the Western Wall for a very early morning prayer. They arrived at the Wall via the Temple Mount which, at that dawn hour, they found to be empty. When recalling this episode, M.N. explained:

I think we did a really foolish thing by going down from there to the Wall. After all, what is the Western Wall? It is just some kind of a wall that throughout the years people have used because they were not able to get to the real place. Why didn’t we stay there [meaning the Temple Mount]? Why did we go to the Wall? What is significant about it? Still everyone was eager to reach the Western Wall.

R.M., now a rabbi, was born in Belgium, and had moved to Jerusalem a few years before the war. In his story, he observed the religious spiritual impact of the Six-Day War in general and the encounter with the Western Wall in particular, even on very secular people:

The excitement when the soldiers called home: “Dad, Dad, I’m beside the Wall, I’m kissing the stones of the Wall!” Secular people who never knew what the Wall was it is so [...] difficult to describe, it was an atmosphere [...] indescribable! There was an intoxication of the senses. Do you know what this is? Each one had to pinch himself to see if it is an apparition or reality. Thank God, we got through it, and it brought about a wave of people who gave much thought to spirituality, to religion. Boys from the Kibbutzim from Hashomer Hatzair [meaning The Young Guard, a secular-socialist youth movement], who didn’t know at all [...] the impact of the victory was [...] above and beyond. So that is approximately what I remember from that period.

4 Visual Testimony: Destruction as Construction

“[…] and mine eyes and mine heart shall be there perpetually.” (Chronicle 2, 7: 16; Kings 1, 9: 3)

The continuation of R.M.’s story/narrative reveals a subconscious appreciation of the impact and future consequences of a specific action carried out in tandem with the stunning victory. The detailed story focuses on the decisive action orchestrated by Dayan, in the course of which, the Mughrabi quarter was demolished and its inhabitants totally expelled. Significantly, the narrator frames this account by attributing to Moshe Dayan, in spite of his infamous reputation, the status of “being our miracle.” In contrast to the hesitancy of other ministers portrayed in the story as being stymied, Dayan acted decisively and, as a reply, transformed the physical
environs of the Western Wall. Conceptualizing the entire scene as a miracle indicates the deep significance of the transformation of a familiar sight and the powers attributed to it.

With this, R.M.’s detailed story is a story about an instantaneous decision and action that has had long-enduring consequences:

We had one miracle, Moshe Dayan, who was Minister of Defense at the time. He was [...] also, not the most righteous man. But I claim one thing. He will receive his reward in heaven. The government met at night, for an emergency meeting, and they tell him, “How do we swallow this frog?” [Referring to the conquering of East Jerusalem]. They couldn’t digest what the world would say. Would they let them be, not let them be? Moshe Dayan, quietly arose and left the meeting so that nobody would notice, went to an army camp, took six or seven bulldozers and twenty huge trucks, travelled with them [...] it was [...] the Wall abutted the Mughrabi quarter [...] he took a microphone, and notified that within 20 minutes all the families must take only their most important possessions and “get out of here.”

It took three days. Starting on Saturday evening and for three days and nights, Israeli bulldozers worked to demolish the Mughrabi quarter, the neighborhood adjacent to the Western Wall whose inhabitants had been removed by Israeli forces. This was done in order to create a vast public space in front of the Wall, intended to be opened in time for the upcoming holiday of Shavuot (Holiday of Weeks or of the First fruits, one of three historical feasts of pilgrimage to Jerusalem, the Christian parallel being Pentecost) which was celebrated that year on June 14, in anticipation of the mass crowds who would overwhelm the place. This hasty, violent project, initially conceived as a discrete operation, was depicted by Shalev-Khalifa (2018) as follows: On June 8th, at the height of the war, when Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) soldiers reached the Wall, preparatory activities were already being taken to exploit the momentum of victory and establish facts on the ground. It appears that, due to the political sensitivities of such an act, it was decided to appoint a civilian company for the task of destroying the Mughrabi neighborhood and preparing the plaza. Fifteen

14 See Masalha (2007: 79–80). The touching stories of the inhabitants of the Mughrabi neighborhood are, of course, part of our research project. However, their personal accounts are the subject of a separate article. See also “Palestinians remember Israeli destruction of Jerusalem’s Moroccan Quarter: https://www.thenational.ae/world/palestinians-remember-israeli-destruction-of-jerusalem-s-moroccan-quarter-1.44591 (accessed April 22, 2020). John Tleel, a Greek Orthodox Palestinian whom we interviewed for this project, opens the chapter “Under Israeli Rule” in his memoirs entitled “I am Jerusalem” with this description: “After their victory, the Israeli authorities did not waste time in changing the face of Jerusalem. Starting from what they have most at heart, the Wailing Wall, they emptied the Mughariba (North Africans) quarter, removed all of the families living there, and levelled their dwellings with bulldozers. In no time, a 10 dunum open space (one dunum equals 1000 square meters) was created from people’s homes, and the façade of the massive Western Wall was exposed, which for centuries had remained out of direct view and had been accessible through a narrow alley” (Tleel 2007: 171).
of the most experienced contractors in Jerusalem undertook the task and arrived at the alleyway of the Wall on June 10, at the end of Sabbath, in order not to desecrate the Sabbath’s holiness.\textsuperscript{15}

Figure 10: Destroying the homes next to the Western Wall for a Huge Plaza. June 11, 1967. (Dan Hadani Archive, Israel National Library Collection)

Figure 11: Ruins of the Mughrabi neighborhood, June 1967 (photo album of Sokolanski-Sela family, Yad Ben Zvi Collection)

\textsuperscript{15}Shaley-Khalifa (2018) further quotes the words of Ben Moshe: “To be considerate to the holiness of the Sabbath, when the Sabbath exited, I received an order to start evacuating the area, in the presence of the mayor, his deputy, the city engineer, and a group of contractors. Mr. Z. Prosak, will be honored by the Havdalah ritual [signifying the differentiation between Sabbath and the week], as those present could not hide their emotions, and tears of joy dampened their faces, and after that the hammers began to strike accompanied by song and an elation of the soul.” https://israelalbum.wordpress.com/2018/05/13/%D7%90%D7%91%D7%99%D7%A8%D7%99-%D7%9E%D7%A1%D7%93%D7%A8-%D7%94%D7%9B%D7%95%D7%AA%D7%9C/ (accessed 25 April, 2020). Also see Benvenisti (1976), Haezrahi (1968), Nitzan-Shiftan (2011: 65), Ricca (2010), Yaffe and Schiller (2007).
Still following along with the first dramatic days after the conquest, let us listen to Shlomo, who was working for a contractor that razed the Mughrabi neighborhood:

[We worked] from Saturday night until the eve of Shavuot […] to prepare for Shavuot. We worked day and night […] . We had to expose the Wall and liberate it from its captivity. [It was] very exciting, very […] God forbid, if they had not ordered the work, then, it would not have been a worthy Wall.

In Shlomo’s phrasing, the tearing down of houses and removing of rubble turns into a process of liberation and release from captivity, to expose the “worthy Wall.” Shlomo incorporates in his personal story the hypothetical unacceptable alternative path in which the site and its image would have remained unchanged.

As has already been noted, an essential feature of the stories is the centrality of the senses in the experience described. While during the ‘waiting period’ and the days of the war itself, hearing is central, in describing the days immediately following the war, vision becomes the focal sense. As illustrated throughout, the narrators turn to sight-related metaphors: a world colored grey suddenly became multicolored; familiar settings suddenly appeared different; a far-off, two-dimensional postcard suddenly invites the narrator to enter it and take it in as a personal experience. The sense of vision also serves an important role later, when this period is viewed reflexively and occasionally critically, as there are those who speak of blindness, of sight without insight, and visions that blurred the ability to see.
Examination of the interviews demonstrates that the first sight of the Western Wall in its new guise often led to what was described as forms of intoxication. The active and rapid metamorphosis engendered a visual epiphany. In the personal stories, this epiphany relates the first encounter with the exposed Western Wall on a diversified emotional spectrum.\textsuperscript{16}

H.W., born in Poland, immigrated as a lone teenager to Israel in 1947. In 1967, already a political activist of the Mafdal party,\textsuperscript{17} he was able to reach the Western Wall even before Shavuot. While telling the story of his first encounter with the Western Wall immediately upon the end of the war, he could not contain himself and broke down in uncontrolled tears.

Immediately following the end of the war, he was invited to a meeting of the National Religious Party in Jerusalem, which included around thirty participants. Included in the invitation, was a promise to visit the Wall at the end of the meeting. This visit to the Wall occurred before the mass pilgrimage on Shavuot, described by so many of the interviewees. Arriving at the height of the destruction of the Mughrabi quarter, his account further illustrates the emotional and spiritual impact of opening up the physical space next to the Western Wall:

The meeting ended, and they brought a bus that transported us all to the Western Wall. […] The entire area was being cleaned from every direction. So we could assume that we were very close, as there were masses, masses! And as we approached, there were plumes of dust, and Teddy Kollek [the mayor of Jerusalem] stood in the middle of where the plaza is today […] and gave instructions, “take down here, take down there.” All kinds of structures, all kinds of walls and such things […] If it wasn’t for Teddy Kollek, if I may exaggerate, there would be no Western Wall. […] When we look at historical pictures, what is the Wall? There is barely a passageway of a few meters […] everyone facing the same small Wall, from the perspective of height, it was also low. That’s the entire Wall, what we know from the pictures. Today, it is unending. […] So listen, what they didn’t do then, would not arise and would no longer be. […] It may be that he saw from a historical perspective, that if we wouldn’t do it now, we would lose the momentum. […] He was a man of vision, creative and cool, so it is possible that he saw the history that would come in the future, and decided, “I’m doing this now.” And look, another thing, for we see in the pictures, what is the Wall? A slab of wall, huge blocks, who knows how they placed them one on top of the other, and the space

\textsuperscript{16} Nitzan-Shiftan, from an architectural point of view, notes that the demolition of the Mughrabi neighborhood transformed the physical intimate experience of touching the stones into a visual experience in which the Wall, now located within a huge pavilion, came to look like an image (2011: 66). Also see Bahat (2017) for examples of disapproving views regarding the demolishing of the Mughrabi neighborhood and the new look of the Wall.

\textsuperscript{17} The National Religious Party (NRP and, in Hebrew, Mafdal, initials for Miflaga Datit Leumit) was an Israeli religious Zionist movement, active from its formation in 1956 until 2008. The Mafdal gradually drifted from a centrist party to a right wing party associated with the Israeli settlers’ movement.
around the Wall is nothing, it is only a few meters, and low height, and if they want for the Jewish people that not tens of thousands, but hundreds of thousands will come […] Indeed, for many holidays, events, the public would be there. So he thought, we need to find an appropriate area, and it is possible, I don’t know, adjacent to the Wall, the houses that were there, some of them were already destroyed […] so he took advantage of the opportunity and the People of Israel own him a big thank you. […] Indeed, it is no longer the Wall of history, of the pictures of history. Suddenly, something else, suddenly around it, the space is different.

This detailed account illustrates the meshing of space and time, as the spatial opening of the Wall removes it, according to the interviewee, from the realm of “historical pictures” to a concrete present and promising future.\textsuperscript{18}

The spatial transformation of the Wall was seen by masses of Israelis, who visited the place during the \textit{Shavuot} holiday later that same week. Being one of the three annual feasts of pilgrimage to Jerusalem, \textit{Shavuot} encapsulates and represents idealized past periods of Jewish nationhood, associated with the first and second Temples in Jerusalem.

The impact of the Wall in its new appearance was engraved as a visual icon symbolizing victory and its accompanying conversions. The potency of this encounter – for better or for worse – was etched in those moments into a highly perceptive sub-awareness. Indeed, the stories are replete with combinations of powerful physical and emotional descriptions as well as a range of reflexive statements.

\textsuperscript{18} Many interviewees referred to traditional visual representations of the Wall. For an overview of these representations, see Sabar (2007).
Figure 13 (caption according to source): “Several buildings in the vicinity of the Western Wall were destroyed to provide space for the rebuilding of the area for the many visitors to come”. June 17, 1967 (Dan Hadani Archive, The National Library of Israel)

Figure 14 (caption according to source): The demolished houses in front of the Western Wall, June 22, 1967 (Dan Hadani Archive, The National Library of Israel)
E.B., was born in Poland and came to Jerusalem at the age of five. She used to go to the Wall from time to time as a girl and young woman before 1948, but said the visits were sporadic, not like “the endless stream after the Six-Day War.” She describes the “reunion” with the Western Wall as follows:

The elation of the first encounter with the Western Wall is beyond words. It’s literally impossible to describe […] It’s like something that […] I don’t want to compare, it won’t be strong enough. But you have something, you lose it and you find it back. All the time, all the time, we didn’t calm down […] You can’t describe that joy. No matter how many years I live, this joy will never come back!

Attempting to convey the magnitude of sensations in words, interviewees repeatedly spoke of the “euphoria” and “exhilaration” characterizing the days after the flash victory and its accompanying results. Moreover, most of the narrators utilized the plural voice when referring to the days following the war, stating, for example: “We were euphoric”; “We were victory intoxicated”; “There was excitement beyond
words”; “Those were days [for which] I have no words to describe how we felt.” Many of the narrators associated these sensations with the sharp transition from a deep, existential anxiety to a sweeping victory, but even more so with its accompanying visible benefits, which, at that initial stage, were highly vivid in the carnival of territorial expansion and, above all, the celebration of ‘Jerusalem’s unification.’ A central feature to be found in numerous narratives revolves around the lightning-fast victory. Its impact on the narrators is manifested in the use of various terms related to suddenness, surprise and even revolutionary upheaval.

Alongside the dramatic and inclusive expressions, many stories conceptualize these sensations in concrete and very personal accounts, encompassing particular memories with extraordinary, divinely-inspired events. The unique combination of the descriptive and the emotional enables access not only to the days following the Six-Day War but also to the meanings that accompany them until today. These multidimensional sentimental frameworks were extremely vivid in many interviews. Numerous interviewees burst into tears while narrating their reunion with the Western Wall. Nevertheless, as illustrated below, the Wall is also a focal image for upcoming divisions.

On Shavuot morning, only six days after its capture, the Old City was officially opened to the Israeli public. […] From the pre-dawn hours, thousands of Israelis streamed toward the Zion gate, excitedly awaiting access into the Old City. At 4 a.m., the congregating crowds were finally permitted to surge towards the Western Wall, as more and more visitors continue to flock to the site of the Wall.

This “victory-pilgrimage,” which according to official sources was comprised of over 200,000 Israelis all walking to the Western Wall, was focal in our research project. Registered as an elusive memory in many of the personal stories, this first beholding of the Wall was and still is extremely potent.
Encountering the Wall bodily, whether after years of separation or for the first time, is a central theme in our study. Listening to the interviewees’ voices, the intermeshing of levels of consciousness and sensual experience becomes vivid and its potency exposed. Prominent among them were encounters with a suddenly changed landscape and concomitant spiritual elation. The central themes that expose this association among the interviewees include an elevating ‘togetherness’ and the loss of individuality in common group feelings of euphoria; the physical transition from restricted movement towards free movement and the sense of being part of a mass pilgrimage; dominancy of specific senses, including those of touch and, above all, sight in a wide range of visually-related metaphors; and continuity with and estrangement from ancient national and more recent familial and personal memories. In addition to these characteristics, the stories are replete with transitions between sleeping, dreaming and wakefulness, as well as reflective contemplations.
5 A State Induced Pilgrimage: Narrating Euphoria

“Arise, and let us go up to Zion.” (Jeremiah 31: 6)¹⁹

The mass movement towards the Western Wall upon its opening to the general public on Shavuot, emerged repeatedly in the interviews. Highlights of people’s experience included the crowds and their exhilaration, their well-ordered behavior and the remarkable togetherness. All this was even more emotive due to the fact that the masses included the whole of the House of Israel, eliminating divisions based on age, gender, religious or ethnic affiliation. The notion of communitas, as developed by Victor Turner (1973), relates to the spontaneous sense wherein – for a limited period – participants experience a kind of egalitarian oneness. This ethos, typical of pilgrimages, was found to be highly relevant to the first journey to the Western Wall, further intensified by the holiday of Shavuot, with its traditional pilgrimage to Jerusalem. However, as will be demonstrated subsequently, some interviewees described this mass pilgrimage using idioms related to blindness.

D.O. was a young teenager in 1967 and her memories of that day phrased in somewhat poetic style are vivid and powerful:

[...] Everyone was happy, a smile was on everyone’s face [...] they were in the clouds [...] Masses, masses! [...] it was very crowded there. You came in, they were all in a mix, there was no [separation between] women, men, they were all together. Together they went to the Western Wall, touched together, kissed together, prayed together. It was an experience. Very, very, very strong!

E.O. who is about 80 years old, was born in Europe, and came to Jerusalem with her family in 1936. She recalls the Wall from her childhood before 1948, but her memories of the first days after the Six-Day War are sharp and remarkably concrete. The rejuvenation of the Wall was central to her multilayered excitement:

We did not suffer from the fact that the city was divided, we did not think of it every day. But immediately after its liberation, after the opening of its gates, there was enormous excitement. Without any comparison, with no comparison! [...] Suddenly, it was opened and people who were never in the Old City were curious to run and see what is in there, and people who still remembered the Old City, they ran towards the lights of memories. And I, I left my work, took half a day and ran as if in a relay race along Jaffa Road, very quickly. And they opened the gates and it was not just us who galloped towards the Old City, but also the Arabs flowed in conjunction with us. In smaller quantities, but they came. [...] So there was two-way movement, they came from the Old City and we descended the slope of Jaffa Road. I remember it as if it were today. And the Wall!! I had remembered that it was a narrow alleyway. Because afterwards they destroyed there to make that entire big thing. They

¹⁹ New King James Version. Also see Mishna Bikkurim 3: 2.
destroyed that entire neighborhood. I remembered that there is a narrow road. So, it was an exciting experience as if we had discovered America. A fantastic emotional experience. And there was no hatred. And there was no antagonism, and the Arabs were very much in shock and were very quiet and sold us items willfully. At ridiculous prices. So that was that day. It was an exceptional experience. Afterwards, it was already a different story. [But then] the Arabs were still in shock for a number of months. The army took control over them of the entire West Bank and then all the Israelis travelled hysterically to see all the well-known and unknown sites.

A sweeping manifestation of these forms prevailed on Shavuot. Z.G., born in Jerusalem, was a young girl during the war. After her marriage she moved to the settlement of Kdumim in the northern West Bank. Here is her story about her first visit to the Wall:

Masses of people flowed, masses. I remember that we walked hand in hand, there was excitement, there was electricity in the air, exceptional excitement. It was something! And to see those stones, suddenly for the first time not in a picture, because beforehand during Sukkot (Feast of Tabernacles, or Feast of Booths or Shelters), we would always hang in our Sukkah (tabernacle, Booth) a picture of the Wall, of Rachel’s Tomb, and of the Cave of the Patriarchs. […] It was in black and white or something like that, and suddenly we see it, it was an exceptional excitement. It was still without a mechitzah [dividing barrier between men and women] … they had just taken down the houses of the Mughrabi quarter. It was really the beginning of the beginning.

For Z.G., the Wall transforms from its pictorial, imagined depiction framed as it was in their family Sukkah into concrete reality. Her sensitive gaze makes a journey of fifty years, incorporating both the Wall and the Mughrabi quarter. In her concluding words anticipating the ensuing long period of occupation for which this was “the beginning of the beginning.”

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20 Sukkot is a Biblical Jewish festival commemorating the huts that sheltered the Israelites during their wanderings in the wilderness on their journey from Egypt to the Promised Land. Celebrated by the building of and staying in a sukkah, it is also one of the three annual pilgrimage holidays to Jerusalem.

21 Hasan-Rokem focuses on the Sukkah as a dialectic praxis and notion in her nuanced article on material mobility versus concentric cosmology. Especially relevant to the present article and its underlying concepts is that of the Sukkah as Heterotopia versus Utopian ideas associated with Jerusalem and the Temple, and the connection of this tension with the three Jewish feasts of pilgrimage to Jerusalem, of which both Sukkot and Shavuot are central (Hasan-Rokem 2012: 164–166).
Figure 17: Israeli youngsters dancing the Hora in the Western Wall plaza in the Old City after the unification of Jerusalem; July 2, 1967 (Fritz Cohen, courtesy of GPO and the National Photo Collection)

Figure 18: Yosef and his sons visiting the Western Wall, 1967 (Photographer unknown, Winkor Yosef Album, Yad Ben Zvi Collection)
Y.R-K. was born to an established Jerusalemite family who have lived in the city for a few generations. She describes the visual makeover of the Wall:

We were told to leave the bomb shelters, that they had already liberated the Old City, and I remember the radio broadcast, how do they call it? ‘Online.’ […] “The Temple Mount is in our hands,” and even beforehand at the Lions’ Gate, when Motta Gur says to him, “Go!” and […] all that. I am a Jerusalemite. I was only once at the Wall before the War of Independence. As a girl, eight or nine years old. And I ran. It was during Sukkot or Passover, I can’t remember, I ran. My father walked with his brother and I ran after him. […] There were steps, it was there and it was small and cramped. It didn’t impress me at all. But afterwards, there was such excitement! There had never been anything like this. It was simply unbelievable, you know, from such deep anxiety […] [we felt] they were going to destroy the state. […] and only a few days afterwards was the most amazing thing, that Teddy Kollek and I don’t know who else, were able to clean the entire plaza of the Wall and to make it very large.

In this depiction, Y.R-K. compares the cramped, narrow Wall of childhood familial memory with the national, open and expansive Wall – illustrated by the role of Jerusalem’s mayor and the national holiday of Shavuot. Thus, the transition from the familial to the national is presented as a transformative experience through an encounter with the Wall. Euphemistically describing the uprooting of the former inhabitants and their dwellings as ‘cleaning,’ Kollek’s sweeping gestures represented a modernist imagination of what there should be, but also the eradication of those who were there before. She continues:

My relatives came from Haifa with their three children. They brought with them sleeping bags and everything. And the following morning, we walked by foot to the Wall […] We walked not exactly via the Old City, but via Mount Zion […] I think that all of the Jews in Israel were there. And they filled up the Wall’s plaza. And started singing there. There was such a feeling of excitement! However, I remember that we already had arguments then, and I said, we need to give it back, we will have problems with them.

As seen above, Y.R-K. combines a reflective, general statement directed at the then future – which is now past, remains present and still future – with her detailed memories and overall excitement engendered by this first visit. In doing so, she is hinting at the links between euphoria and national blindness.

S.W., born in Jerusalem after 1948, was a soldier during the war but did not fight in Jerusalem, only reaching there two weeks after Shavuot. He describes the Six-Day War as a “revealed miracle.” In the interview with him, he was flooded with tears upon recalling his first visit to the Wall:
It was totally surprising. With no fear! It was only two or three weeks after Jerusalem was liberated. The walls fell, and suddenly, you pass through Musrara, a neighborhood that was just in front of the separation fence, and suddenly, you can cross it, you enter the Flowers Gate and reach the Wall – that, with everything I was brought up on, was the place I wanted to reach. It was a monumental experience!

S.W. illustrates how the sudden ability to move freely beyond what was previously a physical and conceptual border became infused with spiritual significance:

It was euphoria, impossible to believe this victory. It was simply a new people of Israel, renewed. […] We were stressed. We waited. We anticipated. And suddenly […] everything changed! Suddenly we are big heroes, we are a ruling nation! […] everything was […] it was something that you can’t believe, impossible to believe! Just a total turnover that we didn’t anticipate, think or expect to happen! And the Wall […] the Wall was a place of prayer, a place of feeling, for me that was the meaning, but the meaning was this entire turnaround. […] Everything was, it was unbelievable […] nobody believed it would happen.

Other conceptualizations relate to the individual and spatial transformation following the war which was present in other interviews. E.N., born in Iran, arrived in Jerusalem as a child in 1949. In 1967, she worked as a school nurse in a neighborhood within walking distance of the Old City:

It is impossible, whoever did not experience it cannot feel this experience. It is something breathtaking. So we stood in line without complaining, we stood in line for hours, until we arrived, and everything that they destroyed was there, they didn’t clean and this, everything was dust, dust like this and that, and we walked, we walked until we reached the Wall. We reached the Wall and you became mute. Really! Dumbfounded like that. And then everyone started kissing and praying and to thank God that we won. It was very moving. […] We walked as during the Exodus from Egypt, we walked. […] We walked as during the Exodus from Egypt, we walked. [For years] the goal was to reach the Wall of which so much was spoken to us, and we would walk to peek from the roof, to see what it was. Some of our family had come 100 years ago to the land, came with donkeys and camels to the land […] my aunt took us to this roof to try and see it. All this time, we waited for this day. […] the fraternity that was there, that everyone was brothers. If only it would be like this now. […] All of the People of Israel.
Framed by the opening sentence “whoever did not experience it cannot feel this experience,” E.N. goes back to highly concrete memories combined with awareness of national and familial attachments to the Wall. These links characterize many of the stories we have heard.

Another enthusiastic voice depicting the first encounter with the Wall is that of B.L., who was born in the USA and came to Jerusalem with her husband before the 1948 Arab–Israeli War:

Then on Shavuot, this was very exciting, everybody went up to the Wall. And you saw people mingling. [...] we were all surprised because there was this big plaza, [...] It was really thrilling. It was something unbelievable. [...] I mean, to think that I’ve lived to see it [...] It’s an amazing feeling, because you’re brought up all your life, about going to the Wall, [...] and all of a sudden – there it is.

M.B-D., a teenager in 1967, was born in Morocco, immigrated as a child to Israel and lived with her family in the neighborhood of Musrara, situated just behind the border adjacent to the Old City:

Right after the war, it was Shavuot, [...] and they let us go to the Western Wall [...] It was something! People came from all over the country and we all walked, we all walked! [...] I’ll never forget it! Pilgrimage, and it was so close! Pilgrimage, as described, [...] to a holy place! You felt as if you had returned to the Bible, as if you had entered the Bible. Can you understand what that felt like? Suddenly, the Western Wall, all of a sudden, all kinds of places [...] Suddenly it’s in our hands! Suddenly you get there, listen, it’s hallucinatory [...] so we were in some sort of euphoria that can’t be captured in words.

Her description is reminiscent of R.M.’s narrative:

We reached the Wall, actually, we came from a number of directions, which was also an incredible spectacle. It reminded me of a pilgrimage [...] during the times of the Temple. From every path you saw [...] it was still dark, it was still [...] before morning. Like ants, as such. Rows and rows of people!!

The encounter with the Wall stands consistently as the basis of a transformative experience. It was a highly uplifting experience for most of the interviewees, but there were also those for whom the metamorphosis of the place resulted in adverse feelings. The following exceptional narrative relates to the loss of intimacy in the encounter with the Wall.

Mira, a woman in her eighties and member of a Kibbutz in the Negev, remembers the Western Wall before 1948, when she was about twelve years old. Returning to the site after the Six-Day War is depicted in her story as a horrifying experience. As she stood in the open plaza that was constructed to face the Wall, she felt the Wall was now “stripped of” its “intimate simplicity,” which she remembers from her
trips to the Wall as a child with her father. This experience made her feel “terrible, like a woman made to stand naked in the sun in the city square.”

The following account is that of S.E., a woman in her seventies, for whom the 1967 events inevitably mesh past, present and future:

And then Motta Gur exclaimed, “The Temple Mount is in our hands,” and they all rushed down to the Wall, because they had prayed all these years that the Wall will return. As if, even for us, the religious public, the concept of the Temple Mount was not yet in our vision. The maximum was the Western Wall. Then the Wall and the paratroopers crying […] and so, the feeling that I am trying to convey is that all the aspirations, after the Holocaust, are suddenly drained into some sort of redemption, the fulfilment of the prophecies, of all the things we hardly even dared to dream about and we see them come true in front of our eyes. All the places came out of the Bible and […] not only to us, it was [for] the entire Israeli public, it was not [politically] right or left, there were no such concepts. […] As if God himself speaks to us through history and things really happen in front of your eyes.

S.E.’s account is indicative of her encounter with the Wall being conceived as a realization of a historical redemptive process. In her story, broad and abstract historical processes are condensed and actualized into specific moments.

Entering Biblical territories replete with Biblical images appeared in various versions. Interviewees found diverse ways of conceptualizing this experience. Thus, M.B-D, cited above, called repeatedly upon the expression “as if you had entered the Bible” or “as if you had returned to the Bible,” while S.E. utilized imaginative expressions of divine revelation by saying “as if God himself speaks to us.” As illustrated below, the mobilization of common personal experiences which relate to different orders of reality, and ones beyond reality, characterizes the accounts of numerous interviewees.

22 See Hemyan, this volume, pp. XX.
6 Between Dreaming and Eyes Wide Open: The Diversity of Points of View

“We were like dreamers …” (Psalms 126: 1)

Dreams and dreaming dominate descriptions of the overall spatial alterations and particularly the initial beholding of the Western Wall. These very personal descriptions, with their raw, unfettered quality, echo the well-known biblical verse “we were like dreamers.” The centrality of visual imagery characteristic of dreaming and its verging on the fantastic makes the dream particularly appropriate for grasping these experiences. In addition, against existential fears of total destruction that prevailed just a few days earlier, the almost total absent of overt signs of physical devastation is highly significant. The narrators found themselves entering a city that had been given to them unblemished, to mesh with the familiar. This unique occurrence of journeying between the familiar and the unfamiliar is of course also typical of dreams. Finally, references to “blindness” also prevail, linked to the overall dreaming complexity. Blindness is linked both to the dream-like consciousness, the lightening victory and the dazzling effect of specific sites.

A.F., born in Jerusalem in 1938, explained:

You simply can’t describe it to yourself. What people went through, what a shake up! It is no wonder that people’s minds were screwed, they became messianic, because it was really an event that whoever had a basis of faith it could turn their head over, it is clear, whoever does not have a deep faith-based background, they went through it with all that we are going through today. But then people were types of, we were like dreamers, this was really the feeling […] we cried when they said, “The Temple Mount is in our hands,” it was something that we looked at one another and we thought it was a dream, that it is unreal.

R.M. cited in length above, explained: “There was […] a sense of intoxication. You know what this is? Each one went and pinched himself to find out if it was illusion or reality.”

Linking real spaces to dream-like ones is further expressed by A.S. Born in a Northern kibbutz, he was serving as a soldier in 1967. Relating to his memories of the days after the war, he portrayed a rather uncanny reality, employing images of self and space listed from fantastic tales:

Alice in Wonderland! […] I kept saying [from then on]: All of a sudden a door opened for us and we went in. And that’s the feeling, that’s the experience, that’s what I talk about.

R.E., was born in Jerusalem and has lived in the city ever since. She was in her last year of high school during the Six-Day War, and related her detailed and vivid memories with a highly reflective viewpoint:
As a girl, we were always told: don’t approach the no-man’s-land. There was a big sign: “Danger, border nearby, landmines, do not approach.” So the awareness that there was a city beyond the fence – I knew. But I didn’t have any realistic concrete image of a city settled by Arabs. [...] [Immediately after the war] they came to us and we came to them, you know, like curious children [laughing]. And we did not understand what might possibly happen. There was also a feeling of it being temporary. Who knows until when it will be open [...] You know what this felt like? As if you do the Passover cleaning and you move the fridge and you discover that there is an entire apartment behind the fridge. That’s how we felt.

For R.E. the previously unseen and unaware of part of the city in which she lived is the focus of the story. The sudden ability to move beyond the previous border makes the place real. As such, and in contrast to other accounts, the ability to access an area is perceived as making it concrete and actual.

S.E., quoted above, lives in a Jewish settlement on land occupied in the Six-Day War. For her, this war is no less than Divine revelation. Describing the victory, she draws directly upon the verse “We were like dreamers.” However, her interpretation of the verse differs significantly from the conventional ones. For her, the phrase illuminates a clear-cut condition of arousal from sleep:

It was [...] really, for this moment, it was worth living, and the truth is that I share this with my secular friends. [...] My father cried, everyone cried, there is a Psalm verse “In God’s return. In the return to Zion we were like dreamers” – this was exactly the feeling! [...] There is a concept of deep sleep in the Bible. What is the deep sleep that can befall a person? So [...] suddenly I understand what “we were like dreamers” is. Deep sleep in the Bible [...] is a call for a new phase, so when he says in this Psalm “we were like dreamers,” you understand [that] until now we were like dreamers, we slept, and suddenly we are something really, really different and new. It was really wow! [...] So it was very, the attitude was very different. I truly felt days of elation, as if you were floating, living really in something else.

As demonstrated in the inverted exegesis above, the encounter with the Western Wall is not the dream, as so many others described it, but an awakening from a dream. Thus, the Wall itself and the People of Israel are now awakening in tandem to a new era. Similar to many others, she bestows human attributes to the Western Wall: The Wall itself is now arising from a very long dream. In this awakening vision, the demolishing of the houses of the Mughrabi quarter may be seen as the removal of the Wall’s sleep dust.

N.S. moved to Jerusalem as a student in 1966, one year before the war. She explains:

I will try to convey it. [...] there is what is known as cataract surgery. And I did it two weeks ago, and suddenly I look and I see colors! The lens, the lens
was murky and I did not see colors sharply. And suddenly I see the flowers, and I see the colors of the world. It is much more colorful! I had the same feeling then. Suddenly, the world is open. Everything is blooming, you see colors […] Before [the war] Jerusalem was a gray city for me. A gray city.

R.E. told the following:

We didn’t understand a thing, our eyes were completely closed, we were completely drenched in the joy of victory and the miracle. You know, because the fear was immense, so was the joy of victory immense. Without any reflection, without any criticism, without any understanding of how it looks from the other side, or what is the meaning of occupation […] we didn’t see all that. We didn’t see, we didn’t see. Our eyes were blinded.

Before returning to the concrete descriptions of encounters with the Western Wall, I would like to present J.S.’s dramatic and detailed description, which deals with her altered experience regarding the entire space.

J.S., born in the USA in 1926, moved to Israel in 1949 and in June 1967, lived in Jerusalem. At the age of 92, she narrated her memories in a nuanced and highly emotional manner. In the following story she tries to put the drama of spatial transformation she experienced following the war into words:

And suddenly this place [the Old City of Jerusalem], which had been visible externally, never the internal parts of a house or a home, buildings were visible but like on another planet, this is the only way to describe it. The same thing happened a few days later […] we lived on a street named Bethlehem Road, and we thought it was a street, and it ended where there were – in the beginning, in the 50s – remnants of the major immigrant camp, located at the end of Bethlehem Road. […] Anyway, [immediately after the war] we passed that [immigrant camp] on the road in the direction of Bethlehem. This was a few days later. And suddenly we were in Bethlehem! In a matter of ten minutes, it’s very close. So, the same sensation. Suddenly I said, “What? I live on Bethlehem Road but [and it is] ten minutes away from the town of Bethlehem? I can’t believe it!” It was like, again, entering another world that was close and totally sealed off before, vaguely visible. It was a major shock, a drama that I’ll never forget. Because it was so near and so far. […] it seemed like another world, it was like I can’t even describe. Another type of experience, where a thing was so – for all those years that I lived in Jerusalem – totally incommunicado, a thing you looked at as something devoutly to be wished for to touch but unable, yet very near. […] And you could only look at it through binoculars or from a viewpoint of some sort.

J.S.’s personal experience regarding the very first days following the war resonates with many others of our interlocutors. Similar to R.E.’s narrative, the sudden access
makes locations tangible and real. Of course, the openness of the space proved volatile and contingent to political and military events.

While the first sight of the rejuvenated Western Wall, which for many had already occurred in *Shavuot*, often led to similar modes of intoxication, there were other voices. R.T. was a young girl in 1967. Her first encounter with the Western Wall presents the concretization of childhood memories as a letdown, a myth ruined when actualized:


[...] In school they talked about the Western Wall, at home they talked about it. It was always with a special atmosphere, with holiness, a special light [...] And for me as a child I was expecting to see something ‘wow.’ [...] And when we got there that first time I was disappointed. I said, “What? All these years they talked about this famous Wall, one of the walls of the Temple and this is it?” It was a big disappointment. Today it looks fantastic to me. But the initial encounter was terrible. Something was shattered there.

In the following interviews, we meet additional expressions which embody the drama of the concrete encounter with the Wall through a conceptualization that
both connects and disengages between fantasy and reality. In this way they combine
descriptions of the first encounter with the Wall with diverse critical reflections.

G.H-R, born in 1945, arrived in Jerusalem as a young student in 1965. When
narrating her memories from the Six-Day War, a prewar postcard-like sight of what
is beyond the reaches of western Jerusalem is followed by a first visit to the Western
Wall immediately after:

When I came to Jerusalem [...] the eastern part of the city was like a postcard
for me, essentially two-dimensional. [...] In ’67’, I lived in the laundry room
on top of a high building [...] from there I could see really well. [...] And in
the winter of that year it was snowing. Like, before the war. In January or
February there was snow. [...] That was the ultimate postcard. The city under
snow, and you could see the Mount of Olives and all that. [...] [And after the
war] my parents came to visit. There was an announcement that they were
opening the city and the first time we could enter was the Shavuot holiday.

Good. We went to see the Wall, it was terribly intriguing. And then, I remem-
ber that we ascended the path that encircles Mount Zion, and I remember it
like it was today, the Gallicantu Church there, I remember someone said that
this was the Gallicantu Church. And there was a house there. And the window
had bars, and people sat behind the bars looking at us. And this was the mo-
ment that I understood what had happened. I hadn’t understood before that
the extent to which this thing would be like that. Suddenly, I understood [...] I
am walking here, and they are in their houses. I sort of understood that there
would be hierarchy, where we are free to walk and they are imprisoned in
their houses. There was a curfew so that we could ascend and see the Wall.

Because there were masses, masses. All residents of the Old City were under
curfew. It was the first time that I saw with my eyes a curfew. [...] They looked
curious, and also a little scared [...] I remember that there was dust [...] and
what is really weird is that I don’t recall in any way what the Wall looked like.

I don’t remember whether I approached the Wall, I remember the walk but I
don’t remember the Wall. I don’t remember where we arrived at, what was
there? I’m sure it did not look like it does now, but what did it look like? I
have no memory. [...] What did it look like? Was it after they blew up the
Mughrabi Quarter? It was rubble. I remember that it was possible to see that
there had been a war, but I don’t remember what the Wall looked like, I don’t
remember the Wall.

This detailed depiction of the pilgrimage to the Western Wall illustrates an uncom-
mon in situ realization: the newly found access comes at a moral cost, separating
those who are free to move from those confined to their homes. With the passage
of fifty years, the sight of the local residents behind window bars becomes an insight
so powerful that it erases the original sight for which this pilgrimage was intended.

With the vivid memory of their eyes, the memory of the Western Wall fades into
oblivion.
A critical approach is also apparent from the description of E.A., who moved to Israel from Iraq as a child, and has since then lived in Jerusalem:

It didn’t occur to me for a second that we would conquer the city! [...] For me, the Wall did not say anything, it was beyond the mountains of darkness and the Jewish Quarter interested me like yesterday’s news [Hebrew lit. “as yesteryear’s snow”]. As simple as that. Meaning that the entire messianic drift, and the Wall, and prayer, and the heavens – it’s not me! Why? This stone wall, for two thousand years we were upheld by a yearning for it and the Temple, the yearning upheld us. The yearning, not the stone wall [...] not the concrete, I don’t need the ‘concrete,’ the concrete bothers me, because then I say, “What, this wall?” [...] my mother was a religious woman, her father was a rabbi, she would tell us on the roofs of Baghdad about the Wall and the holiness of Jerusalem [...]. [After the war] I took my mother to the Wall because she obviously drove me crazy. I still had not gone to the Wall because I told you what my attitude is. I took my mother, a small woman among thousands; I almost lost her among the crowds. I took her, I brought her, I looked at the Wall, and that’s it. Meaning, no [...] truly, no strings were moved inside me.

In his account, E.A. presents the sentiments related to the Western Wall as a split between him and his mother. His mother, like most of the interviewees, longs to reach the actual Wall, touch and kiss the stones and thrust a personal request to God, while he, back then as today, glorifies the yearning, and wishes for it to remain a site of longing, the distant place of myth and folklore remembered from his childhood. Once the object of yearning is attained, it becomes merely a ‘stone wall.’
M.B-O., was born in Tel Aviv, and has lived in Jerusalem for more than fifty years. When relating to the Wall, he places his personal ‘credo’ as the organizing theme:

I am not only a secular person, but an atheist. I know there is no God, […] it’s clear. But this place is important to me, and what matters is not that there was a temple there, because it is nonsense – I do not want to have a temple with all the smoking sacrifices […]. But I identify with two thousand years of Jews who yearned to touch this Wall […] and with the thousands of Jews who came here and touched the Wall weeping. […] All this moves me to this day. Today it’s a bit difficult because they [the Ultra-Orthodox Jews] have taken it over […] that I do not even think about going there. […] But at first, I was definitely excited, I certainly identified.

The final quotation that I have chosen to present demonstrates a sense of emotional agitation: vividly encapsulating the overall euphoria interspersed with ruminations regarding what it engendered. But all this is still in a primeval stage characteristic of the amply loaded, passionate yet elusive nature of the entire corpus of interviews. In the story of L.M., a native of Jerusalem, who was a student at the time, every single sentence simultaneously conveys contradictory feelings:

I call it idol worship. That’s what I have to say, what can I tell you? It was a wonderful period. I miss it so much, what can I tell you? […] it was a wonderful period. So good! And slowly I felt that it wasn’t worthwhile. Jerusalem
is too big for us. Here there are terrorists, here they lay bombs, all of the euphoria slowly dwindled.

 [...] The Wall didn’t do anything to me, not the Temple Mount and not the Wall, it didn’t awaken in me any sentiments. I was [...] maybe I was influenced by [Yeshayahu] Leibowitz (1903–1994), who said “people are praying to stones, idol worship,” so maybe from him [...] After all of that craziness, today I can’t anymore [...] It has lost its taste, it isn’t there anymore [...] And I think a lot about the war of ’67 [...] how beautiful it was! It was exactly the Shavuot holiday, and everyone was with flags, “Jerusalem of Gold” by Shuli Nathan. And that song […] it is, uh, you know? They sang it on Independence Day, and she sang the song “Jerusalem of Gold,” it was really, maybe a week before the Six-Day War, it doesn’t matter. As if she prophesized it! [...] It was “for the watering holes” and all. It was something! And it moved me terribly! But enough, after that, I became tired of that song. Why? I can’t stand hearing it! Because it reminds me of settlements, occupation, everything. It already lowered my [...]
has become accepted, and how it is being expressed culturally and symbolically. (Confino 2008: 304)

In light of Confino’s invitation regarding the 1967 crossroads, our ethnographic project provides a disclosure of layers not readily found in other forms of documentation. Focusing on personal stories collected in the framework of in-depth interviews offers not only vivid accounts that are indicative of folk creativity, but also hints at larger multiplex issues and cultural patterns.

The centrality of the Western Wall was highlighted repeatedly in the stories, revealing a prototype of attachment to this master-image. Once the Wall was ‘liberated’ by Israeli forces, its long-buried, culturally productive potency was manifested instantly. For the interviewees, divided as they were in their political and religious stances, these first days were suffused with a totally unfamiliar sensation, by and large depicted as elation and even intoxication. This euphoria is associated in the interviews with a range of factors. These included the deep existential anxiety present in the days leading to the war and the enrapturing, cathartic power of the dramatic victory. Furthermore, with the reverberating reciprocity of “stones with a human heart,” one cannot exaggerate the dramatic impact of the reunion with the Western Wall. It galvanized and unleashed yearnings and aspirations, some of them previously buried deeply or even totally unknown.

Already, at that initial visit, as hundreds of thousands of excited Israelis flocked en masse toward the Western Wall – their eyes directed at the ancient stone wall, while their feet tread on the shredded remnants of the Mughrabi neighborhood of which only dust remained – already there, with the congregation of packed bodies, seeds of the future were being sown.

Individual experience and spatial transformation following the dramatic victory are intertwined in many of the stories we heard. However, in as much as these are personal sensations, they appear – in different and even conflicting variations – in many of the personal stories, as the plural voice and corporeal images are used repeatedly.

In the description of the flocking of the masses toward the Wall, concepts related to vision – through a broad range of associations – stand out. As such, the drama of the narrative shifts from an emphasis on listening during the waiting period and the beginning of the war, toward a wide spectrum of visual concepts. These

26 Before and during the war there was still no TV in Israel. See Plotkin’s article in this volume for the Egyptian radio propaganda broadcasted in Hebrew and the blurred Israeli broadcasting. Other studies relate in detail to the widespread anxiety prior to the war; see, for example, Gan (2017: 336–337), Haber (1987), Oren (2002) and Segev (2007: 225–337).

27 The commandment related to pilgrimage to Jerusalem is typically associated with sight and vision. The practice of pilgrimage, involves appearing before God (as in Deuteronomy 16: 16). The verb ר.א.ה has the sense of sight in a unique form in Hebrew that activated rabbinic exegetical imaginations to the reciprocity of sight or vision: “seeing” God (His Temple) and “to be seen” by God. For a detailed study of the centrality of the sense of sight in rabbinic literature, see Neis (2013).
include images of transformation from dreams to reality, from sharp vision to fantasy, and illusory changes in spatial orientation associated with sight and blindness.

The centrality of vision is a paramount feature in Rabbi Menachem HaCohen’s book entitled *The Stones Speak*. Published by the Ministry of Defense publishing house in September 1967, it enjoyed wide popularity and was printed in numerous editions. The chapter dealing with the Western Wall makes the following claim:

From the moment that the borders were breached and the path to the Wall was opened, the masses of the House of Israel began flowing towards it in thousands, from all corners of the land and from the Diaspora. This mass ascent *the Western Wall had never ever seen* [emphasis mine, H.S.], and it seems that the Jewish people reward it and pay back twice as much for all the years in which it was severed. This is an unparalleled tangible expression of the deep spiritual connection between the people and the Western Wall. (HaCohen 1967: 68)

Thus, with its sudden ‘resurrection,’ the Western Wall can be considered as the nucleus of an overall transformation. To the hundreds of thousands of pilgrim-visitors who ascended upon the Wall shortly after the war, the massive physical changes in its immediate surroundings, including the demolition of the adjacent neighborhood, manifested as an integral part of this resurrection. Although, of course, this was ordered and carried out following a decision taken by Israeli authorities, in most of the personal stories, it is described as having occurred in a seemingly spontaneous manner. This physical metamorphosis of the Western Wall enhanced the shift from sentiments of longing to those of national command.

Thus, with the sounds of war not yet silenced and without any opportunity for reflection, the bulldozers that destroyed and evacuated the houses of the Mughrabi neighborhood designed a new center of gravity which undercut a familiar landscape and symbolized anew the axis of the Israeli present. The plaza that was opened

28 As has already been mentioned, attributing personified feelings and senses to the stones is a common motif in Jewish folklore regarding the Western Wall.

29 The significance that the Western Wall has gained in the stories we heard – now as a physical ‘place’ – may well be connected to the Jewish idea regarding the interrelationship between the place and the Divine. In fact, as Gurevitch and Aran (1994: 135) remind us, “God himself is called Place (*Makom*). As ‘place’, God is origin and locus of the sacred which is not within the bounds of the cosmos, and is essentially unplaceable.” However, with the unprecedented victory and the accompanying transformation of the actual place, it is no wonder that the Divine was so powerfully felt by many of the interviewees.

30 Years later, Handelman (2010) in his paper on the actualization of power, has analyzed the overall “vector of force” created and embedded in four different “walls” (architectural forms) built in post-1967 “united Jerusalem,” as the cityscape shifts from west to east. Interestingly, as Handelman puts it “it is the dynamics of their vectorization that are crucial, their zeitgeist diffusing through the spaces they organize as they do” (2010: 74). His analysis focuses on bureaucratic aesthetics and the vector connecting walls otherwise distant in topographical space from one another (2010: 76), examines the bridge pylon and three “walls” (2010: 61–62): the first is the new historical museum of the Holocaust (the ‘museum-wall’). The second is a massive continuous stretch of new buildings (the ‘mall-wall’) that crosses the former no-man’s-land between Jewish West Jerusalem and the southwestern walls of the Old City. The third is the ‘separation barrier’ between Palestinian East Jerusalem and its hinterland. In
overnight became a politically and religiously charged center. The Wall ‘adapted itself’ – politically and religiously – to Israel’s future and ‘grew’ in its physical dimensions. To the masses of pilgrims, the new look invested the Wall with transformative powers, symbolizing the magnetic change that many of our interviewees felt physically, and shaped, almost instantaneously, the central symbol of the Six-Day War for years to come.

**Primary Sources (interviews, in alphabetic order according to first name)**

**A.F.** – Female, age 79 when interviewed by Yiftah Levin in Jerusalem on December 12, 2017.

**A.S.** – Male, age 72 when interviewed by Hagar Salamon in Jerusalem on August 7, 2018.

**B.L.** – Female, age 90 when interviewed by Hagar Salamon and Ivana Saric in Jerusalem on May 11, 2017.

**D.O.** – Female, age 63 when interviewed by Hagar Salamon in Jerusalem on August 7, 2016.

**E.A.** – Male, age 80 when interviewed by Ronni Shaked and Hagar Salamon in Jerusalem on July 1, 2017.

**E.B.** – Female, age 85 when interviewed by Roni Ohad in Jerusalem on May 28, 2017.

**E.N.** – Female, age 77 when interviewed by Yiftah Levin in Jerusalem on June 6, 2018.

**E.O.** – Female, age 80 when interviewed by Roni Ohad in Jerusalem on December 3, 2017.

**G.H.R.** – Female, age 72 when interviewed by Hagar Salamon in Jerusalem on December 17, 2017.

**H.W.** – Male, age 81 when interviewed by Hagar Salamon and Yiftah Levin in Jerusalem on March 7, 2019.

his interpretation, this series of wall-forms “work” together “creating a multi-dimensional spheroid of forces to contain and imprison Palestinians’ hopes and aspirations.” Although the Western Wall is not mentioned in Handelman’s entire paper, the present study demonstrates the overarching significance of the 1967 encounter with “The Wall” to any other monumental ‘walls’ built in Jerusalem during the post 1967 era, and far beyond.
J.S. – Female, age 92 when interviewed by Hagar Salamon in Jerusalem on May 22, 2017.

L.M. – Female, age 71 when interviewed by Hagar Salamon, in Jerusalem on May, 2017.

M.B-O. – Male, age 88 when interviewed by Regina Bendix, Ronni Shaked and Hagar Salamon, (in the presence of Bosmat Ibi, Rony Ohad and Galit Gaon) in Jerusalem on February 19, 2017.

M.B-D. – Female, age 68 when interviewed by Hagar Salamon in Jerusalem on June 12, 2017.

M.N. – Male, age 84 when interviewed by Yiftah Levin in Jerusalem on March 5, 2018.

N.S. – Female, age 71 when interviewed by Hagar Salamon in Jerusalem on December 20, 2018.


R.M. – Male, age 83 when interviewed by Yiftah Levin, in Jerusalem on September 6, 2017.

R.T. – Female, age 60 when interviewed by Hagar Salamon, in Jerusalem on April 11, 2018.

S.E. – Female, age 68 when interviewed by Hagar Salamon and Yiftah Levin in Jerusalem on November 1, 2018.

S.W. – Male, age 69 when interviewed by Hagar Salamon in Jerusalem on August 1, 2017.

Y.R-K. – Female, age 80 when interviewed by Rony Ohad in Jerusalem on May 18, 2017.

Z.G. – Female, age 63 when interviewed by Yiftah Levin in Jerusalem on November 29, 2018.
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Haezrahi, Yehuda (1968): Ir ve-shamayim [City of Stone and Sky]. Tel Aviv: Ma’arakhot (in Hebrew).


