Abstract

This article explores the development and negotiation of colonial surveillance practices and technologies at religious sites. In this article I posit that colonial surveillance at religious sites is different—that, unlike in other colonial spaces, the particularities of holy sites as arenas of contestation can enlarge the scope of worshippers’ negotiation of state surveillance technologies and practices, while enabling new modes of claim-making of rights and resources articulated through surveillance. I draw on the case study of Haram-al-Sharif/Temple Mount, a site in occupied East Jerusalem holy to both Muslim and Jewish worshippers, to explore how different surveillance policies and practices are articulated and contested at religious sites in a (settler) colonial setting. I examine three facets of surveillance employed at this holy site: Israeli digital surveillance, Palestinian grassroots sousveillance, and internationally prescribed adjudicating surveillance. Through an examination of these different facets, this article investigates how particular religious, national, and citizenship claims emerge when surveillance is leveraged in order to balance, mitigate, or resolve conflicts.

Introduction

The gates of Haram-al-Sharif, or the Temple Mount,1 were built to awe and inspire the worshippers, pilgrims, and visitors who enter the Holy Esplanade, the site of the al-Aqsa Mosque and the Dome of the Rock in the Old City of Jerusalem. Yet for many who approach one of the eleven gates in use today, their reverence is replaced by a great apprehension over the prospect of being barred, rejected, or placed under limitations by security personnel in their visit to the holy site. The old gates were turned into sites where the bodies of worshippers are sorted as permissible, extraneous, or dangerous; every gate is now dominated by surveillance practices and technologies of checkpoint security (Jones 2008), where individuals are channelled and checked in a bid to thwart a perceived national or religious threat. Even after passing through the Israeli police checkpoints, the surveillance cameras above and near the gates, the ID checks, and bag searches, visitors and worshippers continue to be confronted by surveillance technologies and practices throughout their visit. Palestinian Muslim activists follow and document with their cameras visits by (Jewish) visitors, Jordanian-appointed guardians patrol and prevent illicit activities

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1 Haram-al-Sharif (Arabic for noble sanctuary) and Temple Mount (referring to the hillside location of the biblical Jewish temples) are used interchangeably in this article to refer to the same site, a large plaza in Jerusalem’s Old City where the al-Aqsa Mosque and the Dome of the Rock are located.
in the compound, while posters decry the planned deployment of Israeli or Jordanian operated CCTV cameras above the compound’s walls. The contestation over where, when, and by whom surveillance can be placed and operated at the holy site has led to numerous fatal confrontations, the latest of which happened in July 2017 when Muslim worshippers blocked the compound’s gates in protest over plans by the Israeli authorities to install additional surveillance instruments.

This article posits that colonial surveillance at religious sites is different—that, unlike other colonial spaces, the particularities of holy sites as arenas of contestation can enlarge the scope of worshippers’ negotiation of state surveillance technologies and practices, while enabling new modes of claim-making of rights and resources articulated through surveillance. While many scholars have turned their attention to how surveillance can operate in a “racialized context and . . . asymmetric power relations between the colonizer and colonized” (Zureik 2011: 7), only a few address the specific usages of surveillance at contested religious sites or attend to the multitude of surveillance practices and technologies employed by the colonised in the face of unequal power. I argue that at religious sites in colonial settings, where surveillance can be employed as part of a toolbox of violent and exclusionary governance, the holy stature of religious sites can be leveraged by the colonised—worshippers and pilgrims—in attempts to balance, mitigate, or resolve conflicts between state authorities and religious communities. In adopting Lyon’s (2003: 14) assertion that “socio-technical surveillance systems are also affected by people complying with, negotiating, or resisting surveillance,” I explore how different modes of surveillance—its negotiation or opposition—can elicit varied national, religious, spatial, and citizenship claims, which (re)configure the relations between the state and religious communities.

In this introduction I situate this article within current debates on surveillance at religious sites and in (settler) colonial contexts. I then present an account of recent contestations over the status quo at Haram-al-Sharif/Temple Mount and present the roles of the different actors involved. Next, I explore how different surveillance policies and practices are articulated at religious sites in a (settler) colonial setting, by examining three facets of surveillance employed at this holy site: Israeli digital surveillance, Palestinian grassroots sousveillance, and internationally prescribed adjudicating surveillance. I attend to how each of these facets of surveillance on the Temple Mount contributes to the (re)configuration of state authorities’ relations with different religious communities and citizens. I then conclude this article by emphasising how the negotiation of and resistance to colonial surveillance at religious sites can leverage claims for religious autonomy and freedom of worship to make larger claims of a national and political nature.

The existing limited scholarship on the surveillance of religious institutions and sites focuses primarily on state surveillance practices, which are often presented in terms of efficacy or legality. Richardson and Robbins (2010) examined the extent, legality, and public support of state surveillance of religious communities in the US. Monaghan (2014) explored how the threat of radicalisation is construed to target young Canadian Muslims with enhanced surveillance. One exceptional work is that of Zaal, Salah, and Fine (2007), who investigated how expansive surveillance practices towards Muslim-American women shape their social, political, and family lives through embodiment of “appropriate” behaviour, constant fear, scrutiny, and the occasional act of resistance. In this article I focus on how different surveillance practices and policies at the Temple Mount/Haram-al-Sharif—by state actors, religious communities, and individual visitors—are initiated and negotiated as part of a larger transformation of state–citizen relations.

These relations, just like the Israeli colonial surveillance, do not remain unchanged. Handel (2010) identified three types of surveillance in Israel/Palestine. The first—founding surveillance—is the gaze of an antagonistic ruler over a subject population. The second—inclusive/bio-political surveillance—is a disciplinary surveillance aimed at sorting “appropriate behaviour” from potential societal or security threats. The third—exclusionary surveillance—divides and separates the population when groups of (non)citizens are deemed as redundant, surplus, or dangerous. In Jerusalem, and particularly around Haram-al-Sharif, state surveillance is presented by Israeli state authorities as inclusive to domestic and
international audiences, though exclusionary surveillance practices and technology are simultaneously employed and aimed at protecting a certain population while marginalising, displacing, and hindering the mobility of others. The Israeli shift from a founding and inclusive surveillance towards an exclusionary one is in line with the transformation posited by Gordon (2008) of the Israeli occupation from a disciplinary regime to a sovereign, brutal regime; the former regime tried to incorporate the Palestinian population into “their place” in the colonial administration, while the latter regime seeks to renounce the Palestinian population entirely through separation and segregation. This transformation takes place at diverse spaces, including at residential public spaces, checkpoints, rural areas, and at the premises of state institutions, but also at contested religious sites.

Despite the etymological and historical ties to the all-seeing, all-knowing gaze of God upon his people (Tawil-Souri 2016: 57), surveillance today is anything but holy. With the proliferation of digital, data, and human surveillance in our daily lives, ubiquitous surveillance is often turned into banality: the need for surveillance is questioned in only a few spaces, such as swimming pools, parks, and churches (Goold, Loader, and Thumala 2013). Places of worship can be surveilled by either state security authorities or by the religious institution itself. In both cases, the deployment of surveillance technology and practices in places of worship is often contested as intrusive, unnecessary, or discriminatory.

One such significant example is Jerusalem’s Temple Mount/Haram-al-Sharif. It is a site consecrated by both Islam and Judaism, dominated by the presence of the Dome of the Rock and al-Aqsa Mosque, and a location sacred to Jews worldwide, where the First and Second (biblical) Temples were built and destroyed. Situated in East Jerusalem, the site is part of the territories occupied by Israel, however, it is also under the daily administration of Jordanian-appointed guardians. The Temple Mount is a flashpoint for national and religious violence, where Israeli authorities seek to limit Palestinian presence and sovereignty and where some Palestinian Muslims work to produce “a symbol for political empowerment, a site of public contestation and a focus for religious renewal” (Larkin and Dumper 2012). No wonder, then, that surveillance is ubiquitous on the Temple Mount and that questions about who, how, where, and when surveillance and sousveillance can be conducted on worshippers, visitors, and security personnel on Haram-al-Sharif can lead to conflicts and contestations.

Some of these conflicts and contestations are articulated through religious expression and subsequently framed as religious conflicts. Yet a religious conflict is never detached from the specific social, political, and economic context it arises within. Shaloub-Kevorkian (2015: 14) attends to the Israeli colonial administration of the Occupied Palestinian territories by making a theological argument for Israeli security and surveillance practices. She posits that “in order to maintain a productive global and local industry and political economy that produces and reproduces fear, Israel ‘security’ was transformed into a religion . . . a settler colonial theology.” Following her proposition, the contestation over surveillance on the Temple Mount can be interpreted not only as another element in the Israeli colonial administration but also as a religious conflict between the Israeli “security religion” and the Palestinian aspiration for national and religious autonomy.

This article follows extensive eleven-month fieldwork that I conducted in Jerusalem in 2015–16 and includes data elicited from several dozen interviews I conducted with Palestinian and Israeli residents of the Old City and those who live in the vicinity of the holy sites, as well as with several Israeli policymakers on the municipal and national level. I further conducted extensive participant observation in the Old City and its environs, most often accompanying Palestinian interlocutors in their daily activities, which often entailed varying degrees of friction with Israeli security personnel.² I also substantiate my argument with secondary sources that document the various facets of surveillance at or near Haram-al-

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² The research design described above required addressing specific ethical questions; these were addressed, considered, and approved during application for the SECURCIT project of the European Research Council and during the writing of the doctoral thesis.
Sharif/Temple Mount, including social media publications of police or settlers’ incursions into the site and news articles detailing the implementation and contestation of surveillance practices and technology.

**The Battered Status Quo: A Powder Keg on the Mountaintop**

Jerusalem is a city of extremes; known for its importance to the three monotheistic religions—Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, in recent decades the city also became known as a hotbed for violence and dispossession. After the end of British rule in 1948, Jerusalem was divided between a nascent Israel and the Kingdom of Jordan. In 1967, the Israeli army occupied the West Bank, including the Old City of Jerusalem and its surroundings. Subsequently, the Israeli government unilaterally decided to redraw the map, annexing a large area of about seventy square kilometres surrounding Jerusalem’s Old City, which includes dozens of villages, hamlets, and natural sites; this entire area is known as East Jerusalem. Today, East Jerusalem is home to over 350,000 Palestinian Jerusalemites who were separated from their West Bank compatriots by countless soft and hard borders, including the Israeli separation wall (Dumper 2014).

While Israel annexed East Jerusalem, it did not annex its residents, who are legally designated a stateless foreign population, devoid of Israeli citizenship, and issued only with a revocable residency permit. Both Israelis and Palestinians consider Jerusalem to be their capital city, despite a lack of recognition from the international community for either of the claims. In the years following 1967, while occupied East Jerusalem experienced large-scale land expropriations, numerous house demolitions, and the construction of Jewish-only settlements, a parallel process denoted the inception of partial Palestinian self-rule through the limited autonomy granted to the Muslim and Christian religious communities at their holy sites (Dumper 1997). Even today, in the absence of Palestinian national institutions, Jerusalem’s Christian and Muslim holy sites become islands of fractured Palestinian and Arab sovereignty in the heart of the Israeli-controlled Occupied Palestinian territories.

Nowhere is that more pronounced than on Haram-al-Sharif or the Temple Mount. Shortly after the Israeli army occupied the area in 1967, the Israeli Minister Moshe Dayan, out of fear of igniting a religious war, ordered the removal of the Israeli flag from the Dome of the Rock (Cohen 2017) and returned the daily administration of the site to the Islamic Waqf, a body affiliated with the Jordanian Ministry of Religious Endowments.

In the decades since, a delicate status quo took hold on Haram-al-Sharif. The temporary role of Jordan as the custodian of Haram-al-Sharif was recognised in written agreements by both the Israeli government in 1994 and by the Ramallah-based Palestinian Authority in 2013 (ICG 2015). The site is acknowledged by all sides as reserved for Muslim worship, while the Waqf permits, or tolerates, the entrance of visitors, foreigners, and Israelis to tour the site during limited visiting hours. The distinction between visitors and worshippers is of particular importance—while worshippers are welcome to enter and pray freely in any part of the compound, visitors are strictly forbidden from praying, worshipping, or engaging in any religiously symbolic acts while visiting or else face the prospect of removal from the site by Israeli policemen and/or Waqf security personnel. In the current predicament of continuous Israeli efforts to further isolate and Judaize East Jerusalem (Shlomo and Fenster 2011) and a lack of any credible peace process, this fragile status quo allows for a rare, if partial and temporary, consensus between the governments and institutions involved.

However, the status quo is facing tremendous pressure from different sides and is subject to slow but significant changes over time. On the Israeli side, a growing number of Jewish Temple activists, members of a nationalist religious group calling for the restoration of the Jewish temple at the expense of the existing mosques, are entering the site on a near-daily basis. Cajoled by the fact that their demands are being increasingly voiced at the Israeli Knesset and media outlets, some activists defy police orders and attempt to conduct rituals or prayers within the compound or at its gates (ICG 2015). The fragile status quo is also eroded by the growing limitations imposed by the Israeli authorities on Palestinian worshippers and pilgrims who wish to enter the holy site. Since the construction of the separation wall between
occupied East Jerusalem and the rest of the West Bank, Palestinian Muslim pilgrims are routinely barred from reaching the al-Aqsa Mosque. Even in the few rare occasions when Palestinian pilgrims are granted permits to enter Jerusalem, such as during the holy month of Ramadan, severe and unpredictable limitations prohibit entry to some pilgrims based on their age, gender, place of residency, marital status, and prior employment record (UN-OCHA 2016). Palestinian Jerusalemite worshippers, too, are often prevented from entering Haram-al-Sharif. In 2014, for instance, there were forty-one days of partial or complete closure imposed by the Israeli authorities, often following regional escalations in the West Bank or Gaza (Emek Shaveh 2015).

On the Palestinian side, the growing number of visits by Jewish Temple activists brought about further resistance to any Jewish presence at the compound. Murabitun and Murabitat are self-appointed guardians of al-Aqsa—groups of men and women, respectively. They spend days and nights at the compound, studying and teaching while attempting to block or hinder the entrance of Jewish Temple activists and Israeli security personnel. In addition to the general closur

This state of affairs continuously pits Israeli security forces against Jordanian Waqf and Palestinian activists, leading to numerous violent incursions and confrontations. Previous such confrontations led to the 1996 riots, which followed the unilateral opening of the Western Wall tunnels by the Israeli authorities, and the Al-Aqsa Intifada in 2000, which followed the provocative visit of Ariel Sharon to the Temple Mount.

Claim-Making in the Face of State Surveillance: Citizenship, Sovereignty, and “Smart” Cameras

Considering that every small action taken in and around the Haram-al-Sharif compound could potentially trigger a large-scale violent outburst, different surveillance practices and technologies were deployed and contested throughout the compound and its environs. Israeli security actors seek to use surveillance to predict and mitigate the threat posed either by Palestinian activists, who challenge the Israeli occupation of Jerusalem and the rest of the Palestinian territories, or by the Jewish Temple zealots, who aim to reconstruct the Jewish temple on the site of the existing mosques. These surveillance practices, technologies, and materialities are envisioned as part of a sophisticated modular security array operated in Jerusalem by the Israeli authorities, encompassing both public and private security actors (Volinz 2018b). In the narrow alleys of Jerusalem’s Old City, Israeli security and surveillance agents, technologies, and materialities are omnipresent: state security actors seek to use those to assert sovereignty by intimidating Palestinian residents into compliance, to reassure Jewish Israeli settlers of their safety, while remaining largely invisible to international tourists (Grassiani and Volinz 2016).

In and around the Temple Mount, which is situated on the southwestern section of the Old City, surveillance takes many forms. Lyon (2007: 14) defines surveillance as “the focused, systematic and routine attention to personal details for the purposes of influence, management, protection or direction.” The most visible of these is human surveillance: by deploying uniformed and undercover agents at every gate to the Old City and the entrances of Haram-al-Sharif, as well as at major intersections throughout the Old City, the Israeli police are able to gather valuable intelligence on the activities and whereabouts of the tens of thousands of Palestinians who enter the Temple Mount daily. The same agents also enforce the collective or individual restrictions placed on worshippers entering the compound—either at its gates, on the streets and alleys of the Old City, or sometimes even on the sanctified plaza itself. On numerous occasions, undercover police officers present themselves to Palestinians who are blacklisted and barred from praying in al-Aqsa and escort them out of the Old City. Their work is thus not limited to surveillance, as their mission can be turned operative when the need arises. Undercover officers are also tasked with providing protection to Jewish Israeli settlers living in Haram-al-Sharif’s vicinity and to Jewish Israeli visitors to the holy site. Private security guards escort Jewish Israeli residents of the Muslim
Quarter of the Old City (Volinz 2018a), while undercover officers accompany Jewish Temple activists when they conduct their monthly marches around the Temple Mount, calling for the re-establishment of the Jewish temple.

The streets of the Old City of Jerusalem are under constant surveillance by a large array of CCTV cameras, most of which are operated by the Israeli police. From a wide room within the police headquarters at David’s citadel, police officers stare at hundreds of screens, day and night, observing every nook and alley within the one square kilometre that the Old City encompasses. The system, named Mabat 2000 (Mabat means gaze or outlook in Hebrew), was installed as part of the preparations for the visit of the late Pope John Paul II in March 2000. With over six hundred cameras placed throughout the four quarters of the Old City and its surroundings (Saban 2017) and a surveillance balloon watching from above in times of particular tension, it permits the police a complete overview of unfolding events throughout the Old City.

Digital surveillance allows the state to categorise and sort the bodies of worshippers within clearly demarcated “spaces of belonging” and “spaces of intrusion”—roughly but not clearly corresponding to the Old City division between the quarters. Muslim worshippers entering the Jewish quarter are often frisked or detained, while the entry of Jewish Israeli visitors to the Muslim quarter can require the dispatch of additional forces for their protection. The differential policing applied throughout Jerusalem, in which Israeli security personnel attend to Palestinians as a potential danger and to Jewish Israelis as worthy of a dedicated enhanced protection, is mirrored in the practices of digital surveillance. Congregating Muslim worshippers caught on camera quickly raise a red flag that requires an immediate response, often in the form of placing further limitations on Palestinian mobility. On numerous occasions, police barriers block the main avenues leading to Haram-al-Sharif and police agents lock the gates between the Muslim and Jewish quarter, while sometimes they even resort to forcefully closing and clearing the nearby Palestinian bus depots, thereby preventing Muslim worshippers from arriving by public transport.

The police deployment of CCTV cameras is especially dense around the Temple Mount compound, where at least one CCTV camera is placed in each gate. While the passage into the compound for Muslim worshippers is usually not subjected to individual security inspection, CCTV cameras can aid the Israeli authorities in recognising blacklisted Palestinians. The former head of the unit in charge of Mabat 2000, Lieutenant Commander Doron Turjeman, described the surveillance system as “providing all our forces on the ground immediate access to live reports. We’re working with the system in three temporal dimensions ... It enables us to foresee events even before they happen” (Yanowski 2015). And indeed, his comments reflect the growing dependency of the police on digital surveillance, which provides a sanitised, purportedly neutral policing tool.

This dependency was highlighted in July 2017, when confrontations over sovereignty at the Temple Mount came to a head: after a fatal attack on an Israeli police officer, the site was cleared by the Israeli authorities and completely closed for several days; during this time Palestinian shoppers and visitors were forcefully excluded from the entire Old City. When Haram-al-Sharif was re-opened, the Israeli police ordered additional control measures at the gates of the site, including setting up rows of barriers and conducting individual checks using metal detectors. Among many Palestinians, the Israeli security measures were perceived as encroaching on their limited autonomy at the holy site, sideling the Islamic Waqf and transforming the gates around the Temple Mount into new checkpoints, which are widely recognised as a hallmark of the Israeli occupation in other parts of the West Bank and East Jerusalem. During the following week, Palestinian Muslim worshippers refused to enter Haram-al-Sharif, choosing instead to pray at the Old City’s gates, protesting the Israeli intrusion into the limited sovereignty at their place of worship. The Israeli authorities initially responded to the protests with (fatal) violence, but subsequently decided to change course and replace the metal detectors with a “high tech” solution, incorporating “security measures based on advanced technologies (‘smart checks’)” (PMO 2017), particularly CCTV cameras with metal-detection and face-recognition capacities.
The “smart cameras,” estimated to cost over USD $25,000,000 (PMO 2017), were promoted by the Israeli police as able to identify people carrying knives, hand grenades, or any other potential weapon. Yet for Palestinians, the prospect of smart cameras became a cause of even greater consternation than the hand-held metal detectors. Palestinians articulated their opposition through three concerns—the loss of privacy, the incorporation of biometric data in surveillance technologies, and the loss of national sovereignty and personal freedom following the introduction of enhanced surveillance. When the smart cameras were announced, the hyped metal-detection feature caused a fury in Palestinian social media, with warnings against “stripping cameras,” which would present an injury to individuals’ privacy and infringe upon the modesty of female worshippers. The second concern was related to the incorporation of the ever-growing Israeli biometric database into the facial-recognition feature of the smart cameras. The Israeli biometric database is planned to include the coded facial structure of all Israeli citizens and residents, as well as of West Bank Palestinians who have previously applied for work and entry permits to Israel. The introduction of smart cameras could thus simplify the enforcement of limitations on blacklisted Palestinians and prevent the entry to the Temple Mount of West Bank Palestinians who entered Jerusalem without an Israeli permit (e.g., by scaling the separation wall); should they try to pass the smart cameras, they could face exclusion from Jerusalem and possible arrest.

The third concern involves the perceived loss of partial sovereignty and autonomy that Palestinians enjoy while visiting Haram-al-Sharif: it is not only a site of prayer but also the largest public open space in East Jerusalem, where educational, social, and political activities take place. A Palestinian activist described his indignation in a media interview, “I want to go in and out of al-Aqsa as I please—who are they to surveil me? . . . I am entering a house of worship. It violates the individual’s personal space. Palestinians will continue to resist because we reject these measures” (Tahhan 2017). Following the continuation of Palestinian protests, the Israeli authorities publicly withdrew their plans for enhanced surveillance, sparking celebrations in East Jerusalem.

Graham and Wood (2003) suggest that digital surveillance unequally distributes rights and (in)security to different citizens while maintaining the state’s claim of equal security provision. Such a claim by state actors is continuously repudiated by Palestinians, who argue against the Israeli surveillance plan in Haram-al-Sharif, drawing on a potent mix of national, religious, and universal claims that are articulated in the contestation over sovereignty and security at the holy site. Firstly, Palestinian national claims are centred around the demand to end the Israeli occupation of East Jerusalem in order to allow the city to flourish as the future capital city of a Palestinian state. Jerusalem and its holy Muslim and Christian sites have long been considered symbols of Palestinian endurance in the face of violence and political tribulations (Pappe 2004: 129–35), and the demand to end the Israeli security interventions at the Temple Mount, one of the last vestiges of Palestinian autonomy in Jerusalem, is part and parcel of the larger Palestinian struggle. Secondly, Palestinian claims against the Israeli surveillance plans were articulated through a secondary set of convictions: through a Muslim religious prism, which decrees the Israeli presence as haram—as proscribed by Islamic law—and as infringing upon the consecrated endowment, which permits the Islamic Waqf to maintain the holy site in perpetuity. Thirdly, Palestinian protestors’ demands invoked universal human rights: freedom of religion, freedom of assembly, rights to privacy, and security. Their claims of the Israeli authorities, such as the demand to respect an individual’s personal space and the opposition to stripping cameras, are claims that transcend the local—they go beyond the national and religious claims posed by Palestinian Muslim worshippers, turning to external sets of values while still remaining inextricably linked to the local political context. In Israel/Palestine, the language of universal human rights elicits both a fledgling hope for international interventions and at the same time a course of action long discredited, invoking an “immoral subject of what a good person should not be: insincere and selfish, or ‘political’ in the utilitarian, scheming, all-talk, self-serving nonsense” (Allen 2013: 186). Claim-making based on universal rights and values became a contested practice among

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3 For a wider discussion on the merits and limitations of surveillance using biometric databases in Israel, see Stevens (2011).
Palestinians, used intermittently and often inconsistently, yet remaining a prominent vessel of conveying Palestinian dissent to Israeli rule and its agents, practices, and technologies.

The rejection of the technologically advanced cameras by Palestinian worshippers illustrates how the depoliticisation of surveillance can be contested and how a nominally religious cause is always intertwined with larger political, social, and economic considerations. A protest over the surveillance of a religious site was widely understood as a demand for equal distribution of rights: to privacy, unhindered mobility, and religious autonomy. While the Israeli authorities seek to unequally (re)distribute rights, resources, and mobility through enhanced surveillance at a major religious site, Palestinian Jerusalemites make their own claims through a contestation over surveillance. Through the use of exclusionary surveillance (Handel 2010), Israeli security authorities attempt to define a religious and national population as a threat to be confronted and mitigated, whereas Palestinian (Muslim) Jerusalemites seek to redefine their broader relations vis-à-vis the Israeli authorities through a limited struggle over their rights at a significant religious site.

**Sousveilling al-Aqsa: Turning the Lens in a Digital Age**

The Israeli authorities are not the only ones to use surveillance in and around the Temple Mount. Palestinian political and religious activists, as well as Islamic Waqf personnel, are keeping a close watch on Israeli actions at Haram-al-Sharif. When Israeli border police officers or Jewish Temple activists enter the site, their actions are documented, broadcast, and narrated through social media, often with the aim of drawing attention and support in the face of a perceived threat to the al-Aqsa Mosque and its surroundings. As the Israeli surveillance array grows to become more and more sophisticated, Palestinian activists use the means available to them, particularly handheld smart phones, to present and support their narrative of the conflict.

Sousveillance, or “watching from below,” has been conceptually explored both as a type of inverse surveillance and as participatory surveillance (Mann and Ferenbok 2013). In recent years, with the concurrent growth of digital and mobile technologies, sousveillance expanded in both scope and political significance. Sousveillance today can be used to voice grievances through social media, to document (and provide evidence towards the prosecution of) crimes and violations, and to deter law enforcement agencies from using overt violence. While handheld cameras produce shaky and tilted representations of reality, these live representations are often considered authentic and trustworthy, seeing as mobile digital technologies “enable those who are normally the object of surveillance to turn the lens and reverse its powers” (Fiske and Hancock 2016: 138–39). However, there are limits to the capacity of technologies’ advancement to transform entrenched power relations—or as Wilson and Serisier (2010: 167) point out, scholars need to critically assess “the potential of counter-surveillance to create a transparent utopia of official accountability.”

Palestinian activists use surveillance-from-below in an attempt to mitigate the overwhelming Israeli force and to safeguard their status within a fragile status quo over the holy site. In particular, sousveillance allows Palestinian activists to document, assess, and counter the threats posed by Israeli security agents’ incursions into the holy site, by the activities of Jewish Temple activists, and by controversial Israeli archaeological and public works (ICG 2015). The photos and videos of religious Jewish men and women entering Haram-al-Sharif, accompanied by heavily armed Israeli border police officers, are used in publications about Israeli incursions, which are published almost daily in both traditional media outlets and in social media. The particular importance of this sacred site guarantees an attentive external audience of Muslims and Arabs worldwide, as well as foreign policymakers concerned with the geopolitical implications that events on the Temple Mount might have on the wider region. Palestinian sousveillers seek to mobilise both transnational Muslim religious support and pan-national Arab sympathy in attempts to counter Israeli incursions to the holy site. Their footage is often shown on transnational Arab television channels, where the audience is “finding its centre of concern in preserving an Arab Jerusalem” (Rinnawi 2006: 146), and in the newsfeeds of millions of social media users worldwide.
While Jewish Temple activists describe their entry to Haram-al-Sharif in terms of ascension, Palestinian social media posts often accompany the imagery of Israelis atop the Temple Mount with captions decrying the “incursion” or “invasion” by “Israeli settlers” during their “break-in sessions.” Through messages warning of the dangers the Israelis pose to al-Aqsa, they attempt to rally support for the larger Palestinian struggle in the Occupied Palestinian territories, including East Jerusalem. Reversing the colonial gaze entails a rejection of the Israeli authorities’ monopoly over surveillance, as well as the right to interpret ongoing events and their visual documentation. The nature of religious sites as spaces where perceived religious and national violations gain particular urgency is continuously used in attempts to garner support to the larger cause of rejecting the Israeli colonial administration in East Jerusalem and the rest of the Occupied Palestinian territories.

The Palestinian sousveillance of Israeli actions on the Temple Mount and the subsequent publication of its photographs and videos are met with anger and concern on the Israeli side. Jewish Temple activists are angry about having to endure heckles by Palestinian activists (ICG 2015) and upset about subsequently seeing their faces in videos posted online, while Israeli security authorities are concerned about “incitement to terrorism,” partially due to the Palestinian calls to “save al-Aqsa” (Martin 2015). Others are afraid that Palestinian sousveillance might stymie police work: Israeli MP Moti Yogev called for an end to the Palestinian recording of Israeli police officers on the Temple Mount, arguing that “every policeman . . . after the camera records him, he’s called to the Police Investigation Unit. With this concern in mind, the policemen are castrated and thus unable to work” (Knesset Internal Affairs Committee 2014).

Yogev’s strong and gendered language suggests sousveillance is a significant tool in the limited arsenal of Palestinians who seek to maintain the status quo and the (partial) autonomy it grants them. Unable to match the Israeli police and military capacities, Palestinians use sousveillance as a “weapon of the weak,” seeking to draw attention to their plight by documenting and disseminating imagery of perceived infringements upon their rights and (religious) autonomy. Palestinians claim their rights, resources, and autonomy through the practices of sousveillance—through the materiality of “harassing” intruders with their cameras, the potentiality of subverting official accounts by means of alternative reports, the construction of a national narrative via social media, and the claim-making as citizens demanding protection from police violence. By employing these practices, Palestinian Jerusalemites place themselves in the ambiguous position of making claims both within and against the Israeli polity—demanding rights and resources from the Israeli authorities while maintaining a commitment to a Palestinian national liberation struggle.

**Adjudicating Surveillance: Providing “Neutral” Data Towards Conflict Resolution**

While some may perceive surveillance as only a cause of conflict, a set of practices, technologies, and knowledge that can lead to further confrontations and violence, it should be noted that some stakeholders see things differently. The deployment of additional surveillance technologies and new surveillance practices can also be considered part of a political solution for an intractable conflict. The rising tensions on Haram-al-Sharif between the Israeli authorities, Jewish Temple activists, Palestinian worshippers, and the Islamic Waqf have contributed to repeated escalations over the years, events which often resonated throughout the wider region. Seeing as events on the Temple Mount are interpreted differently by each side, minor incidents such as police patrols, public works, or the entry of Jewish visitors to the compound can lead to large-scale confrontations in the absence of an agreed-upon, trustworthy, and accessible documentation of unfolding events. Currently, Palestinians overwhelmingly resent and reject Israeli surveillance, and the Israeli authorities are dismissing Palestinian sousveillance as one-sided or illegal. Recently, external stakeholders entered into the fray, suggesting a compromise based on additional

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4 One example can be found in the regular reports of Silwanic (http://www.silwanic.net/ [accessed December 6, 2017]).
surveillance: in October 2015, American Secretary of State John Kerry negotiated an agreement between Israel and Jordan, in which both sides agreed that Jordan, the custodian of the holy site, would install a comprehensive array of CCTV cameras around and throughout the Temple Mount, with the exception of the mosque’s interior (Ravid 2016). The footage would then be streamed directly to both a Jordanian and an Israeli control room; a Jordanian minister announced that the footage would then be broadcast online, to enable a wider public to observe contested events on Haram-al-Sharif (Ravid 2016).

This attempt to resolve conflicts through the use of surveillance technology suggests that surveillance is considered by some as a potentially benevolent, technical, and neutral element, which can produce unbiased, indisputable data that can lead to conflict resolution. This approach, which I conceptualise as “adjudicating surveillance,” corresponds to the emergence of surveillance positivism, where human reflection and discretion are removed from the automated application of technology in the pursuit of order and security (Los 2006: 89–90). Adjudicating surveillance emerges where parties to a conflict, willingly or out of external imposition, turn to surveillance technology to pass judgement on the dispute between them. It is a different kind of arbitration, transformed from a human process of opposing considerations and eventual reconciliation into a technical and automated interpretation of data streams. On the Temple Mount, the installation of CCTV cameras was intended to provide an agreed-upon technical platform, which would serve to inform both the stakeholders and the general public on possible transgressions, infringements, or violence—adjudicating on the many small conflicts emerging over “who did what, where, and when” at the holy site.

Yet adjudicating surveillance faces several inherent weaknesses that could limit its potential to mitigate conflict. “Neutral” surveillance can transform disputes over content into disputes over technicalities—cameras’ angles, preciseness, as well as temporal and spatial coverage. Furthermore, adjudicating surveillance requires clear demarcation lines—what acts, and where, constitute a violation or transgression—to successfully mitigate conflict. On Haram-al-Sharif, governed by a fragile, ill-defined and unwritten status quo, adjudicating surveillance can therefore not replace a political solution.

In Jerusalem, the American–Jordanian–Israeli surveillance plan did not go unchallenged—it drew strong opposition among Palestinians, many of whom felt excluded in the discussions between Israel, Jordan, and the USA. A Palestinian campaign led by the Islamic movement, an Israel-based organisation, featured posters throughout Haram-al-Sharif calling for Jordan to refrain from installing surveillance cameras. Their campaign, under the slogan “The image is clear,” stressed that Israeli violations in al-Aqsa are already well-documented and that placing additional surveillance cameras would extend the intrusion of the occupying Israeli forces into the holy site (Keis 2016). Furthermore, they argued that since the surveillance project would stream only the events on Haram-al-Sharif itself, the larger picture of Israeli restrictions on Palestinian worshippers, which mostly take place at the gates of the site and the checkpoints around Jerusalem, would be disregarded. Following the Palestinian campaign, the Jordanian government withdrew its participation in the surveillance plan and the entire project was abandoned (ibid.).

**Conclusion**

In this article I argue that colonial surveillance at religious sites is different than in other colonial spaces. Through three examples from the case study of Jerusalem’s Haram-al-Sharif/Temple Mount, I highlight how the particularities of holy sites as arenas of contestation over surveillance can enlarge the scope of worshippers’ negotiation of state surveillance technologies and practices, while enabling new modes of claim-making of rights and resources articulated through surveillance. The question of colonial surveillance at religious sites in a colonial setting provides a fertile ground for worshippers to develop wider national, religious, and universal human rights claims towards state authorities; it further enables the leveraging of supportive transnational religious networks; and it provides a justification for the intervention of external stakeholders.
These interactivities take place in an increasingly digital surveillance landscape (Graham and Wood 2003), where differentiating policies, laws, and practices are readily effectuated by the deployment and configuration of seemingly de-politicised, technical surveillance measures. Yet these developments do not go uncontested. When it comes to holy sites in a colonial setting, the sensitivity over state surveillance can be translated into contestation over privacy, mobility, and (religious) autonomy. The discussion in this article illuminates how the increasingly intrusive state surveillance at religious sites can be negotiated, mitigated, and countered; and how newer surveillance technologies, such as facial-recognition and stripping cameras, can be discerned, politicised, and resisted by their intended targets.

In this article I further explore how multiple facets of surveillance at religious sites play a significant role in the way that religious communities articulate claims towards state authorities. Different surveillance practices, technologies, and knowledge are introduced and contested, a process in which rights, resources, and political decision-making are (re)distributed and (re)claimed. Due to the increasingly fragile status quo on Haram-al-Sharif, with its frequent confrontations, mobility limitations, and blacklists, special consideration should be made before the introduction of new surveillance practices and technology. While the Israeli authorities adopt surveillance as a measure of security and sovereignty, Palestinian worshippers fear it would revoke their individual rights and partial collective autonomy. Their own measures of sousveillance elicit citizenship claims of recognition, rights, and resources. Their claim for rights and resources, coupled with their usage of sousveillance in the (re)production of a national narrative, demonstrate that claim-making practices play “a crucial role in enabling political communities to be established, demarcated and therefore be governed” (Somers 2008: 69).

To conclude, this article highlights how, in the small space of Haram-al-Sharif or Temple Mount, multiple facets of surveillance can be explored. Surveillance practices are used by state authorities to unequally redistribute (im)mobility and (in)security between different religious and national communities in a manner that controls, contains, and disciplines targeted populations. Worshippers and pilgrims use sousveillance to mitigate and resist state interventions, drawing a “weapon of the weak” while making demands towards state authorities, which are articulated through national, religious, and universal claims. At the same time, major external stakeholders pursue enhanced surveillance in order to pre-empt and resolve conflict, by presenting “indisputable” footage as a technical basis for documentation and negotiation. At the gates of Jerusalem’s holiest site, new relations between state authorities, citizens, and (religious) communities are continuously (re)configured through the introduction of surveillance technologies and practices, bringing to the fore the potential for violent escalations, while also enabling worshippers to make claims seeking individual, religious, and national freedom and simultaneously providing a platform for negotiations towards a political solution.

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References


