

# “Silence,” Heritage, and Sumud in Silwan, East Jerusalem

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## Abstract

Research interest in Jerusalem’s archaeological-touristic landscape and its close relationship with Israeli state-sponsored settler colonialism has increased greatly over the past two decades. At the center of Jerusalem’s contested landscape is the Palestinian village of Silwan and the “City of David” in East Jerusalem. Much of the scholarship concerning these sites has used the language of heritage and memory in a manner that has inadvertently highlighted the narrative practices of Jewish-Israeli settlers at the “City of David.” The author argues that the result is a top-down framing of the sites whereby Palestinian Silwan, at least in the academy, is now associated primarily with Israeli archaeological activity. Based on four months of ethnographic fieldwork in East Jerusalem during the summer of 2022, Stokes explores the nature of silencing, heritage, and *sumud* in Silwan and the social, political, and ethical complexities involved in reporting on it. The author suggests that recent developments in Palestinian heritage praxis hold the key for appropriately projecting and legitimizing Palestinian resistance in Silwan to an international academic and political audience.

## Keywords

Heritage; archaeology; conflict, Palestine; Israel, City of David; East Jerusalem; Silwan.

Research interest in Jerusalem’s archaeological-touristic landscape and its close relationship with Israeli

state-sponsored settler colonialism has increased greatly over the past two decades.<sup>1</sup> Mobilizing “the language of heritage” to govern states and communities is therefore a well-established and recognized paradigm, particularly when that heritage is archaeological. At the center of Jerusalem’s contested landscape is the Palestinian village of Silwan and the “City of David” in East Jerusalem.<sup>2</sup> These sites in particular have been the focus of recent scholarship that, in the majority, is critical of Israeli attempts to erase Palestinian history and populations from the landscape.<sup>3</sup>

This literature employs a variety of conceptual frameworks to understand and expose the structures that underlie settler-colonial expansion of the “City of David” into Silwan. In some cases, this scholarship utilizes the language of heritage and memory conflict, albeit through predominantly traditional (that is “tangible”) understandings of what heritage is.<sup>4</sup> The result is a top-down framing of the sites, a consequence of which is that Palestinian Silwan, at least in the academy, is now associated primarily with Israeli archaeological activity. Indeed, despite widespread sympathy with the Palestinian community of Silwan in the literature, a comprehensive review leaves the reader with relatively limited knowledge about the village, its cultural heritage, or its Palestinian inhabitants. Also lacking is an awareness of the methods of Palestinian resistance against settler colonialism in Silwan beyond legal challenges in Israeli courts. Palestinian voices are therefore marginalized within an academic discourse that foregrounds a settler-colonial narrative, even if through a critical lens. This is often due either to an overemphasis on settler activities or, as has been frequently reported, a failure to appreciate the systems of silencing that Palestinians are subjected to.

Here, I reflect on four months of ethnographic fieldwork in East Jerusalem during the summer of 2022. I explore the nature of silencing, heritage, and *sumud* in Silwan and the social, political, and ethical complexities involved in reporting on it. In doing so, I have tried to be conscious of the fact that in discussing instances of Palestinian silence, one must recognize that silence can also act as political agency and is not, therefore, involuntary.<sup>5</sup> In sum, I suggest that recent developments in Palestinian heritage praxis hold the key for appropriately projecting and legitimizing Palestinian resistance in Silwan before an international academic and political audience.<sup>6</sup>

## **Silwan and the “City of David”**

Silwan is a Palestinian village, now neighborhood of Jerusalem, located immediately south of Jerusalem’s Old City. The settlement has ancient precedence due to its proximity to one of Jerusalem’s few natural springs, given mention in the Bible.<sup>7</sup> It has been a center of Palestinian life for many centuries. The village also holds special historical significance for visitors from Arab regions as it was traditionally “the last resting spot for travelers approaching Jerusalem from the south.”<sup>8</sup> Today, Silwan is home to an estimated fifty thousand Palestinians, over half of whom are under the age of eighteen. Although it is within the boundaries of Jerusalem as delineated by Israel’s formal annexation in 1980, Palestinian Silwan is severely neglected by the municipality.<sup>9</sup> Rubbish collection is sporadic, meaning waste spills out onto most

streets. Building permits are granted extremely rarely, forcing growing Palestinian families to build upward and illegally in an *ad hoc* fashion.<sup>10</sup> Unemployment hovers around 40 percent, exacerbating discontent and civil unrest, and general infrastructure for daily life (schools, roads, cultural centers) is largely dependent on Palestinian and external funding sources, which at present are few.<sup>11</sup> Among older Israelis, Silwan is perhaps still regarded as a source of resistance activity, a reputation first earned thirty years ago during the first intifada, 1987–93.<sup>12</sup>

The “City of David” is an active archaeological excavation and tourist visitor center located in the Wadi Hilwa neighborhood of Silwan. The site is run by the Ir David (City of David) Foundation, or Elad (a Hebrew acronym for City of David). Elad is a right-wing Jewish settler organization with an agenda to replace both the historical signature and contemporary Palestinian presence in Silwan with an exclusive Jewish-Israeli ethnohistory and reality on the ground. Elad seeks to strip away Palestinian legitimacy through the “performative power of tourism,”<sup>13</sup> and is involved in “shady dealings” in Silwan, such as the forced evictions of Palestinians from their homes.<sup>14</sup> Elad’s first settlement in Silwan came in the late 1980s and by 2010, some two thousand Jewish settlers had moved into the neighborhood, often displacing Palestinians in the process.<sup>15</sup> The current number of settlers in Silwan is disputed; Palestinian residents suggest the number is now closer to four or five thousand.

The land of the archaeological tourist site is managed by the Israel Nature and Parks Authority (INPA) and is leased to Elad “without tender.”<sup>16</sup> In this capacity, Elad has underwritten excavations at the site since 1994. This is the latest chapter in the area’s long archaeological history. Western excavations in Silwan date back over one hundred and fifty years (overseen predominantly by the Palestine Exploration Fund and subsequently by Israeli authorities). Despite Israeli archaeological excavations and population transfer in the occupied Palestinian territories (including East Jerusalem) being illegal under international law, Elad’s “salvage” excavations continue at breakneck speed.<sup>17</sup> Their narration of the site’s history provides tourists with a one-dimensional bibliocentric history of Jerusalem, which all but eliminates Palestinian and Muslim history.<sup>18</sup> Despite the half million or so tourists that visit the “City of David” complex every year, many of them Israeli religious Jews and military groups, Israeli Jews’ awareness of other histories at the “City of David” is extremely limited.<sup>19</sup> Both Elad and non-Elad guides at the site can regularly be heard discussing only the relevant biblical periods as well as the “City of David’s” sole importance to the Jewish people – indicating an ignorance of, or an unwillingness to, introduce to the tourist gaze the more than two millennia of civilizations in Jerusalem, including its deep connections with Christian and Islamic history.<sup>20</sup>

## **Silencing in Silwan: Fieldwork Experiences**

Despite Israel’s “comprehensive legislation to protect the right to privacy,” sophisticated Israeli state and private (state-backed) surveillance in Silwan is extensive.<sup>21</sup> This undoubtedly has an impact on when and where Palestinians feel they can speak

openly. By monitoring Palestinian movement to and from residential properties, for example, state authorities and settler organizations use opportune moments to enforce Israel's much-discussed 1950 Absentee Property Law. In June, a prominent Israeli archaeologist and left-wing activist in Silwan told me his Palestinian colleagues had first shared concerns about the extent of surveillance in Silwan following the second intifada in the mid-2000s. Since then, the technology has been enhanced dramatically. According to a recent report published by the non-profit organization 7amleh, "some of these cameras look directly into private homes . . . some interviewees researchers spoke with believe the cameras can identify them automatically."<sup>22</sup> The impact of such intense surveillance in Silwan for Palestinian-researcher relationships resembles Foucault's metaphorization of Jeremy Bentham's Panopticon, whereby individuals self-regulate due to the perception of Orwellian state monitoring.<sup>23</sup> Indeed, self-silencing is a well-recognized facet of oppressive political environments.<sup>24</sup>

The distinction between voluntary and enforced silence is blurry. This is especially the case when, from an outside perspective, Palestinian silence is often interpreted as political "anti-normalization."<sup>25</sup> What is certain, however, is that Elad and the Israeli state's politicization of the Palestinian presence in Silwan creates an environment whereby Palestinian heritage, meaning here anything that ties Palestinians to the land, is also taboo. The gatekeepers of information about Palestinian heritage in Silwan are understandably tight-lipped, as information can be used against these communities.

Israeli surveillance likewise affects Palestinian community organizing. Several Palestinians from Silwan informed me that community meetings, which take place in temporary tent structures (of which there are normally six across Silwan), are routinely disrupted by Israeli police.<sup>26</sup> In some instances, the police dismantle or completely destroy the tents. On one of my first fieldwork trips to Silwan with a local friend and tour guide from the al-Bustan neighborhood, we passed the remains of a recently destroyed tent (see figure 1). The ability of Israeli police to shut down community events on a moment's notice is testament to the extent of the surveillance of Palestinians in Silwan.

Bearing in mind the extent of surveillance in Silwan, it is easy to understand how field research may be interpreted by residents as suspicious and unnatural. This can be especially true of ethnography, whereby the researcher will "appear," spend a period of "hanging around," and then at some point "disappear."<sup>27</sup> Some Palestinians understandably perceive such behavior as overlapping with that of Elad, settlers, and even Israeli intelligence agents. Young children in the streets of Batn al-Hawa (a neighborhood in Silwan) would ask me: *Inta mustawtin? Inta yahudi?* ("Are you a settler? Are you a Jew?"). The perception of researchers as settlers, even if only at a glance and even if only in this case through the eyes of children younger than thirteen, indicates an inquisitiveness that doubles, I think, as a defense mechanism. In a city defined along ethnic and religious lines, categorizations based on a mix of religious/ethnic identity and political activity are telling, important even, yet they also indicate a mistrust that runs deep in Palestinian neighborhoods facing constant threats of evictions and settler violence.<sup>28</sup>



Figure 1. Open space in Silwan where a community tent once stood, 8 July 2022. Photo by author.

Thus, when contacting individuals in Silwan, I quickly discovered the delicacy with which introductions must be made. An example of this came during a trip with a fellow researcher to a well-established shop in Wadi Hilwa. Upon entering the shop, I greeted the shopkeeper. The researcher I was with entered the shop after me and before introducing himself, asked in English, “How long has this shop been here?” The shopkeeper immediately became defensive and replied: “What type of question is that? Why are you asking me this question? You don’t ask these kinds of questions straight away when you enter my shop.”

The shopkeeper then explained to us that Elad employees and Palestinian real-estate middlemen have tried on numerous occasions to either buy his shop or uncover information that could be used to exploit legal loopholes to take the property forcibly. To the shopkeeper, my fellow researcher’s question raised suspicions that he was yet another representative trying the same thing. After my colleague apologized (multiple times), the conversation was amicable; however, it was clear that the shopkeeper was still somewhat on edge. As the conversation drew to a natural conclusion, I asked whether he would be interested in having a further conversation about my research topic. The answer was categorical: “I don’t talk to anyone, and I don’t say anything . . . I don’t want to get in trouble . . . You can’t speak to anyone or say anything in this country.” I told him he

would be completely anonymous, but this was not enough to allay his concerns: “I don’t want trouble, I just want my life, my shop and to be left in peace.”

The shopkeeper’s auto-silencing indicates the difficulty of outsiders to engage in community organizing and day-to-day relationship building in Silwan. This is exacerbated by settler groups using Palestinian real-estate middlemen, meaning that even local Palestinians who speak Arabic without an accent can be cause for suspicion. The shopkeeper’s position as an elderly resident of Silwan, and therefore someone with lived experiences of a Palestinian presence in the village pre-1967, positions him as a key gatekeeper of a Palestinian heritage narrative in the village. His cautiousness in discussing such topics with outsiders emphasizes the silent efficacies of Israeli state and settler surveillance.

I witnessed similar self-silencing on the several occasions I visited the Wadi Hilwa Information Centre (WHIC), situated in the same neighborhood. The WHIC was “established in 2009 and . . . aims at revealing the facts and history of the village of Silwan.”<sup>29</sup> By name and mission, then, the WHIC should be able to provide those interested with information about Palestinian life and history in Silwan as well as ongoing Israeli human rights violations. The founder and director of the WHIC, Jawad Siyam, has first-hand experience of Elad, having been embroiled in court cases with them for almost twenty years. Siyam is perhaps the most well-known Palestinian spokesperson in Silwan and anyone asking about information on Silwan will most likely be directed by locals to the WHIC offices on Wadi Hilwa Street, fifty meters or so from the entrance to the “City of David” complex.

Despite the relative renown of the WHIC, the front entrance is often locked. Only those familiar with the area would know there is a second entrance through an adjacent alleyway. I visited the center on approximately ten occasions. On all but one, the offices were either closed or empty. On my most recent visit, however, I met a young Palestinian woman sitting at a desk in the first office. She asked me if I needed any help. I explained why I was there and that I had been in contact with Jawad Siyam. The woman led me into a second office. A man in his thirties sat behind the desk, a nearly finished cigarette between his fingers. I repeated my introduction and asked about the WHIC’s work. The man became visibly uncomfortable in his chair and suggested that I come back next week when Jawad would be there.

Realizing that to continue the conversation would make matters worse, I thanked them for their time and left. Upon exiting the building, the peculiarity of the situation struck me. Here was an information center dedicated to challenging Elad and the Israeli authorities through the power of information sharing and dissemination. And yet a form of auto-silencing prevailed. Refusal or reluctance to talk to strangers is a symptom of the state and settler control over Palestinian spaces in Silwan.<sup>30</sup>

Heritage is at the heart of community, and vice versa.<sup>31</sup> Settler groups and the Israeli state are winning the battles in court, but that is but one small part of the story. Without forums to gather and engage in community issues, the development of a Palestinian heritage narrative in Silwan becomes even more difficult. In such circumstances, alternative forms of heritage expression and legitimization have emerged.

## Heritage as Noise and *Sumud* in Silwan

Despite instances of self- and enforced silencing in Silwan, Palestinian resistance through heritage practice is thriving. There are several active community centers in the village, which serve the different needs of residents. These community centers run a range of initiatives that straddle themes of Palestinian heritage as *sumud* (a Palestinian cultural philosophy often translated as “steadfastness”).

### *The Wadi Hilwa Information Center*

Despite my own and other researcher’s experiences of “silence” at the WHIC, it is important to consider the role of the center (and others like it in Silwan, such as the Madaa Silwan Creative Center, discussed below) in terms of local organization and local government (again, in lieu of effective relationships with the Jerusalem municipality). In her 2019 book, Chiara De Cesari explores the role of NGOs in Palestinian society and demonstrates that, without effective governmental leadership, Palestinian NGOs “collapse the divide between mobilizing heritage to defend vulnerable communities and resist the encroachment of the (Israeli) state . . . using heritage to develop institutions and help build the (Palestinian) state.”<sup>32</sup>

The WHIC, although not strictly a heritage NGO, speaks the language of one. Take, for example, this excerpt from their website:

Despite the oppressive measures, the social, cultural, and economical injustices . . . the international *silence* . . . we, the residents of Wadi Hilwa in Silwan, have decided . . . to be effective in communicating the correct information that concerns us. We, the residents of Wadi Hilwa, *did not delegate anyone to convey the information on our behalf* and we do not allow any person to obscure our deep-rooted identity which lies in the houses, stones, trees, gardens, springs, and sky of our village.<sup>33</sup>

Within this paragraph lies the crux of experiences that cross paths in Silwan. The WHIC expressly states its role as a representative for the people of Wadi Hilwa. In other words, it communicates a Palestinian story with a Palestinian voice. Having control over the image of Wadi Hilwa and Silwan (which includes selective silence with outsiders) is but one means of protecting and developing Palestinian cultural memory and heritage in Silwan. Additionally, the center’s website, *Silwanic.net*, is regularly updated with news of court appeals, house demolitions, arrests of community members (most notably boys under eighteen), and Israeli killings of Palestinians in East Jerusalem, and thus acts as a source of news that is communicated and archived through a local Palestinian perspective, albeit in English. The use of English and Arabic on the website does, however, indicate the WHIC’s desire to reach a wider, international audience.

### *Madaa Silwan, Art Forces, and “I Witness Silwan”*

The Madaa Silwan Creative Center is a community hub responsible for many of the heritage initiatives in Silwan. In addition to creating secure spaces for children’s

programs and summer camps, the center also works specifically to empower Jerusalemite women in “all aspects of public and private life based on gender equality and women’s human rights.”<sup>34</sup> Perhaps their most elaborate project, however, comes in the form of a collaboration with the WHIC and the San Francisco-based activist group Art Forces. Since 2015, the project “I Witness Silwan” ([www.iwitnesssilwan.org](http://www.iwitnesssilwan.org)) has used “community public art . . . to inspire critical thinking and action.”<sup>35</sup> “I Witness Silwan” transformed blank walls in Silwan into large murals that are visible from the “City of David” and the Old City walls – several hundred meters away.

The murals are varied but follow several general themes. First, and most famously, are the numerous sets of eyes (see figure 2) that lend their name to the project.<sup>36</sup> The eyes depict well-known icons of political resistance and civil rights struggles such as George Floyd and Che Guevara, as well as activists who became victims of Israeli military violence such as Rachel Corrie.<sup>37</sup> Some of the eyes are those of local elders in Silwan, names that will be recognized by many, if not most, of the Palestinians in the village.



Figure 2. The eyes of Rachel Corrie, 8 July 2022. Photo by author.

The eyes, which often border upon abstraction to those unfamiliar with the people to whom they belong, send a loud message to settlers: There are witnesses to the violence. Because of limitations on verbal and physical resistance against Israel’s occupation, art has become a powerful tool for Palestinian political expression. De



Cesari stresses the difference between Palestinian practices of heritage and that of the Israeli state (and in this case Elad): “Rather than being preserved in a glass case, this past is creatively put to use for social and economic development. It is a site of cultural production in the present.”<sup>38</sup> The emphasis on heritage as a tool for survival, and nothing less, cannot be stressed enough in the case of Silwan. Court proceedings may occasionally go in Palestinians’ favor, preventing (temporarily) a forced eviction here and there, but that is preventative, rather than productive, heritage action. The “I Witness” project places Palestinians in Silwan back on the front foot.

There is a broader message, too. In adorning the walls of Silwan with internationally recognized figures of resistance and solidarity, residents draw deliberate parallels between the Palestinian struggle and other civil rights movements worldwide. Perhaps the most notable is that of Black Lives Matter, a connection that brings together Palestinian and Black American experiences of police brutality and civil discrimination in Israel and the United States respectively. Art elsewhere in the occupied territories repeats this symbolism (see figure 3) and recognition of a shared plight is reciprocated by the BLM movement.<sup>39</sup>

Elsewhere in Silwan, motifs of the Palestinian sunbird and national flower (a red poppy) can be seen pasted across many of the residents’ houses. This is about as explicit as the Palestinian nationalistic iconography gets, as Art Forces and “I Witness Silwan” work hard to ensure the safety and prosperity of both the property owners and the project itself. Several members of the project told me that paintings of Palestinian flags, as well as the word “Palestine,” have in the past been removed or painted over by settlers and the Jerusalem municipality. Excluding this, the artwork is generally left untouched by settlers, security guards, and the Jerusalem municipality.

The easiest explanation might be that the removal of the Palestinian artwork from



Figure 3. Artwork depicting an Israeli soldier wearing the infamous Ku Klux Klan hood adorns the separation barrier next to Checkpoint 300 in Bethlehem, 22 August 2022. Photo by author.

Silwan would require the unnecessary use of public funds. A deeper consideration of “why” might suggest that for Israel to remove Palestinian artwork plays into Palestinian hands. It demonstrates that artwork is effective in solidifying Palestinian presence and ownership through community expressions of *sumud*. That the majority of the artwork will not be removed gives Palestinians of Silwan something that Israeli authorities cannot take away, at least not without ceding ground in an ongoing legitimacy war.<sup>40</sup>

During my fieldwork, I met several individuals involved in “I Witness Silwan,” including the head of the project who was visiting for the first time since the pandemic. I was also fortunate to be in Jerusalem at a time when the project was particularly active. I therefore witnessed the spread of artwork across the neighborhoods of Silwan from one day to the next as well as how the active *doing* of these murals provided young members of the community with a creative outlet during the summer months.<sup>41</sup> Children and other community members would regularly join the Art Forces team for several days at a time, making the murals their own, and using the activity as an opportunity to explore Palestinian identity in the village. The power of art to capture the imagination of both Palestinians in Silwan and outside onlookers is potent. It is a means of resistance that can simultaneously provoke discourse, disseminate political messages, distill identity, and beautify a critically underfunded area of Jerusalem.

### *The Edward Said Library*

Although the first public library in Silwan, “Silwan Reads,” was opened in 2009, access to educational materials in Silwan remained limited until very recently.<sup>42</sup> Due to the work of the Madaa Center, a new branch named the Edward Said Library was opened in March 2020 in the Wadi Hilwa neighborhood, and now boasts a collection of over four thousand books. While predominantly acting as a critical educational resource for Silwan’s younger residents, the library is also a rare quiet space for children to gather and partake in social activities. Such activities enable individual and community dialogue with Palestinian heritage, as I saw on a visit following an arts and crafts session (figures 4–6).

On one of my visits to the library, I met Maryam, who volunteers as library events coordinator and runs the library’s social media pages. She told me that one of the most important events made possible by the library is a weekly discussion for teenagers and young adults. Each week, the group decides on a topic of discussion and then meets in the library space. The week I met Maryam, the discussion topic was: *What are the psychological effects of occupation?* The painted faces of Palestinian cultural icons that adorn the walls of the library (see figure 7) – courtesy of Art Forces and “I Witness Silwan,” – make it easy to see how the space could be a powerful place for imagining and building a better future.



Figure 4. A Palestinian flag and map of Palestine are sketched into clay, Edward Said Library, 12 August 2022. Photo by author.



Figure 5. Handala, a character created by Palestinian cartoonist Naji al-'Ali, depicted in clay by a child, Edward Said Library, 12 August 2022. Photo by author.



Figure 6. Kids will be kids. A snowman and a dinosaur (Isanosaurus?) suggest a place where imaginations can run wild, 12 August 2022. Photo by author.



Figure 7. One wall of well-known Palestinian and Arab cultural figures at the Edward Said Library, 12 August 2022. Photo by author.

According to the stories of the people I met there, the library is a sanctuary for Palestinians of Silwan, especially in the context of oppressive surveillance. This is a place where residents of Silwan can be themselves and openly express pride in their Palestinian heritage. One day at the Edward Said Library, a young woman I had just met spontaneously sang a traditional Palestinian folk song for a friend and me, and then recited for us from memory a poem by the Palestinian poet Tamim Barghouti. This is a place for people to be themselves, even in the presence of a visitor.

### *Heritage and Resistance through Social Media*

Increasingly during my fieldwork, it became obvious how prevalent social media had become in the political struggle in Silwan. During my meeting with a board representative from al-Bustan Association, the man got out his phone to show me an Instagram page, #SaveSilwan, that he created in 2021 and still runs today. #SaveSilwan posts news and informational pieces about Silwan, its history, and ongoing political struggles against Elad and other settler groups in the village. He works with a friend to ensure that each post has both Arabic and an English translation. The result is that the page has over 173,000 followers, many of them from Europe.<sup>43</sup> Such a large following

provides al-Bustan Association with a powerful tool for influencing international public consciousness. Indeed, #SaveSilwan is perhaps the only Palestinian platform operating in Silwan that comes close to matching the outreach of Elad at the “City of David.” While footfall in Silwan cannot compete with the alleged half million visitors to the “City of David” each year, Elad’s combined following across YouTube (62,000), Instagram (26,900), and TikTok (421) social media is only half the number of those viewing #SaveSilwan.<sup>44</sup> On a smaller but no less significant scale, there are individuals active within Art Forces and “I Witness Silwan” with personal Instagram followings close to ten thousand. The individual who runs the Edward Said Library Instagram page has an approximate following of 3,500. These are substantial numbers and provide an insight into both the reach of Palestinian activism in Silwan and the appetite for a Palestinian narrative in the international community.

There are also challenges to consider here, the most significant being how to navigate exposure, for both good and bad. Naturally, Palestinians in Silwan are projecting their stories out into the world and as discussed earlier, building ideological bridges between other groups who continue to suffer from oppression. However, in a context where a painting or waving of the Palestinian flag can result in one’s arrest, the act of monitoring the actions of the Israeli occupation as well as promoting ideas of Palestinian nationalism through very public platforms undoubtedly exposes those responsible in Silwan to considerable personal risk.<sup>45</sup> 7amleh’s 2021 report claims that “scores of Palestinian Jerusalemites, particularly those active on social media platforms, have been detained on incitement charges in recent months . . . [due to] expansive incitement laws to intimidate many Palestinian users into silence.”<sup>46</sup>

## Conclusion

Silwan is entering a critical time in terms of its Palestinian heritage and identity. Settlers continue to evict Palestinians from their homes, slowly working to increase the ratio of Israeli Jews to Palestinians living in East Jerusalem. Concurrently, expressions of Palestinian heritage are thriving despite pressures from the Israeli state and settler-colonialism. I have tried to highlight Palestinian *sumud* in Silwan through a heritage framework to stress the importance of cultural heritage practices to the wider Palestinian struggle. Already, projects such as “I Witness Silwan” resemble the form of a living and evolving archive or museum. Achieving some measure of international recognition or protection for Silwan would create significant difficulties for further Israeli Jewish settlement plans in Silwan. For now, heritage innovation continues to prevail under the most difficult of circumstances.

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## Endnotes

- 1 See: Nadia Abu El-Haj, *Facts on the Ground: Archaeological Practice and Territorial Self Fashioning in Israeli Society* (Chicago: University Chicago Press, 2001); Maja Gori, “The Stones of Contention: The Role of Archaeological Heritage in Israeli-Palestinian Conflict,” *Archaeologies* 9, no.1 (2013): 213–29; Raphael Greenberg and Adi Keinan, “Israeli Archaeological Activity in the West Bank 1967–2007: A Sourcebook,” Emek Shaveh, online at [emekshaveh.org/en/israeli-archaeological-activity-in-the-west-bank-1967-2007/](http://emekshaveh.org/en/israeli-archaeological-activity-in-the-west-bank-1967-2007/) (accessed 22 October 2022). Raz Kletter, *Just Past? The Making of Israeli Archaeology* (London: Routledge, 2006); Gideon Sulimani and Raz Kletter, “Bone Considerations: Archaeology, Heritage, and Ethics at Mamilla, Jerusalem,” *International Journal of Cultural Property* 24, no. 3 (October 2017): 321–50.
- 2 Labels are important in Israel-Palestinian contexts. I use quotation marks for the “City of David” throughout this piece to symbolize both the contested nomenclature and disputed archaeological interpretations at the site.
- 3 See: Michael Feige, “‘Where It All Began’: Archaeology, Nationalism, and Fundamentalism in Silwan,” in *Toward an Anthropology of Nation Building and Unbuilding in Israel*, ed. Fran Markowitz, Stephen Sharot and Moshe Shokeid (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2015), 243–58; Katharina Galor, “The City of David/Silwan,” in *Finding Jerusalem: Archaeology between Science and Ideology*, ed. Katharina Galor (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2017), 119–31; Raphael Greenberg, “Pompeo in Silwan: Judeo-Christian Nationalism, Kitsch, and Empire in Ancient Jerusalem,” *Forum Kritische Archäologie* 10 (2021): 55–66; David Landy, “The Place of Palestinians in Tourist and Zionist Discourses in the ‘City of David’, occupied East Jerusalem,” *Critical Discourse Studies* 14, no. 3 (2017): 309–23. There are, of course, those who interpret events on the ground differently; see Shaul Bartal, “Fabricating Palestinian History: The Battle over Silwan,” *Middle East Quarterly* 19, no. 2 (2012): 31–41.
- 4 See Beverley Butler, “The Efficacies of Heritage: Syndromes, Magics, and Possessional Acts,” *Public Archaeology* 15, no. 2–3 (December 2017): 113–35; Beverley Butler, “Keys of the Past: Keys to the Future – A Critical Analysis of the Construction of the Palestinian National Museum Policy as an Alternative Deconstruction of Routinised International Heritage Discourse,” *Present Pasts* 2, no.1 (2010): 113–25.
- 5 Christina A. Sue, “Hegemony and Silence,” *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography* 44 no.1 (2015): 113–40.
- 6 For the safety and security of all participants and non-participants, names have been changed throughout this report.
- 7 Ronny Reich, “The Date of the Gihon Spring Tower in Jerusalem,” *Journal of the Institute of Archaeology of Tel Aviv University* 45, no. 1 (2018): 114–19.
- 8 Ahdaf Soueif, “The Dig Dividing Jerusalem,” *Guardian*, 26 May 2010.
- 9 United Nations, Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, *The Status of Jerusalem*, 1997, 3, online at ([un.org](http://un.org)) [bit.ly/3VyE3Jz](http://bit.ly/3VyE3Jz) (accessed 21 September 2022); Nisreen Alyan, Ronit Sela, and Michal Pomerantz, “Policies of Neglect in East Jerusalem,” (May 2012), online at ([law.acri.org.il](http://law.acri.org.il)) [bit.ly/3Db6mGN](http://bit.ly/3Db6mGN) (accessed 21 September 2022); Aviv Tatarsky and Oshrat Maimon, “Fifty Years of Neglect: East Jerusalem Education Report,” Ir Amim, (September 2017), online at [www.ir-amim.org.il/en/node/2874](http://www.ir-amim.org.il/en/node/2874) (accessed 21 September 2022).
- 10 Palestinians rarely receive permits from Israel to build in East Jerusalem, forcing them to build houses that are deemed illegal under Israeli law.
- 11 Hanna Baumann and Manal Massalha, “Your Daily Reality is Rubbish,” *Urban Studies* 59, no. 3 (2022): 548–71; “Silwan & Ath Thuri Town Profile,” Applied Research Institute – Jerusalem, 2012.
- 12 This perception of Silwan was exemplified to me in August 2022 at a dinner in the Jewish Quarter of the Old City. After the meal, a religious Jewish man from Abu Tur – a mixed Israeli-Palestinian neighborhood in south Jerusalem that borders Silwan, also called al-Thuri – asked me without irony if my work in Silwan involved interviews with Hamas or Islamic Jihad. Neither group is known to operate in Silwan.
- 13 Chaim Noy, “Narratives and Counter-Narratives: Contesting a Tourist Site in Jerusalem,” in *Narratives of Travel and Tourism*, ed. Jacqueline Tivers and Tijana

- Rakić (Burlington: Ashgate, 2012), 135–50.
- 14 Meron Rapoport, Ehud Tagari, Orly Noy, and Yudith Oppenheimer, “Shady Dealings in Silwan,” *Ir Amim*, 2009, online at [www.ir-amim.org.il/sites/default/files/Silwanreporteng.pdf](http://www.ir-amim.org.il/sites/default/files/Silwanreporteng.pdf) (accessed 21 September 2022).
  - 15 Nisreen Alyan, Mahmoud Qarae’en, Keren Tzafirir, Miri Gross, and Tali Nir, *Unsafe Space: The Israeli Authorities’ Failure to Protect Human Rights amid Settlements in East Jerusalem*, (2010): 4; B’Tselem, *Eyes Wide Open*, 2020, online at ([btselem.org](http://btselem.org)) [bit.ly/3EWpMjN](http://bit.ly/3EWpMjN) (accessed 21 September 2022); Aviv Tatarsky, Eyal Raz and Oshrat Maimon, “Broken Trust: State Involvement in Private Settlement in Batan Al-Hawa, Silwan,” *Ir Amim*, (May 2016).
  - 16 Rapoport, Tagari, Noy, and Oppenheimer, “Shady Dealings in Silwan,” 2009, 12.
  - 17 Elad and the Israel Antiquities Authority claim the excavations are “salvage” excavations, which exempt them from this law. However, it is well-documented that Israel liberally uses the term “salvage” excavations in order to further scientific research and ultimately, Jewish settlement in the occupied Palestinian territories. See “‘Salvage Excavations’ in the West Bank for Settlers Only: An Analysis of the Scope and Objectives of Archaeological Excavations in Area C of the West Bank 2007–2014” Emek Shaveh (August 2017). See also Greenberg and Keinan, “Israeli Archaeological Activity,” and Ahmed A. Rjoo, “The Impact of Israeli Occupation on the Conservation of Cultural Heritage Sites in the Occupied Palestinian Territories: The Case of ‘Salvage Excavations,’” *Conservation and Management of Archaeological Sites* 11 no. 3–4 (2009): 214–35.
  - 18 Raphael Greenberg, “A Privatized Heritage: How the Israel Antiquities Authority Relinquished Jerusalem’s Past,” Emek Shaveh report (November 2014).
  - 19 C. Noy, “Narratives and Counter-Narratives.”
  - 20 John Urry and Jonas Larsen, *The Tourist Gaze 3.0* (London: Sage Publishing, 2011). In their book, Urry and Larsen argued that the tourists’ understanding and experience of tourist spaces are shaped, sometimes inaccurately and for political purposes, by the tourist industry.
  - 21 Sophia Goodfriend, Bashar Bakri, and Rawan Sheikh Ahmad, “The Expansion of Digital Surveillance in Jerusalem and Impact on Palestinians Rights,” 7amleh – The Arab Center for the Advancement of Social Media, 2021, 3. See also the video by Hagit Ofran, Israeli Peace Now, of Elad filming in Silwan, June 2010, online at ([youtube.com](http://youtube.com)) [bit.ly/3yS3yM6](http://bit.ly/3yS3yM6) (accessed 21 September 2022).
  - 22 Goodfriend, Bakri, and Sheikh Ahmad, “Expansion of Digital Surveillance in Jerusalem,” 7.
  - 23 Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punishment: The Birth of the Prison* (London: Penguin Books, 1975).
  - 24 Hastings Donnan and Kirk Simpson, “Silence and Violence among Northern Ireland Border Protestants,” *Ethnos* 72, no.1 (2007): 5–28; Richard Falk, *Palestine’s Horizon: Toward a Just Peace* (London: Pluto Press, 2017).
  - 25 “In the Palestinian context, ‘normalization’ (*tatbi’* in Arabic) has been defined as ‘the process of building open and reciprocal relations with Israel in all fields, including the political economic, social, cultural, educational, legal, and security fields.’” Walid Salem, “The Anti-Normalization Discourse in the Context of Israeli-Palestinian Peace-Building,” *Palestine-Israel Journal of Politics, Economics, and Culture* 12, no.1 (2005). Not all Palestinians have the same stance toward normalization.
  - 26 The tents provide open shaded spaces – rare in Silwan, and are also used for children’s activities, such as drama workshops and summer camps.
  - 27 David Waddington, “Participant Observation” in *Essential Guide to Qualitative Methods in Organizational Research*, ed. Catherine Cassell and Gillian Symon (London: Sage Publications Ltd, 2004), 154–64.
  - 28 This is evidenced in JustVision’s 2012 film *My Neighbourhood* about Shaykh Jarrah. During the film Rifqa al-Kurd, the elderly Palestinian grandmother of the film’s young protagonist, Muhammad (now an internationally revered activist and poet), expresses uncertainty about the alliance of Israeli Jews standing alongside Palestinians in their protests against the Israeli state and settlers: “If you want to hear the truth, I don’t really trust them [Israeli Jews against settlers]. You’re telling me that they will leave their people, their religion, and join us? It’s not logical.” JustVision, *My Neighborhood*, online at [justvision.org/myneighbourhood/watch](http://justvision.org/myneighbourhood/watch) (10 October 2022).
  - 29 See website, [Silwanic.net](http://Silwanic.net) (accessed 21

- September 2022).
- 30 As I was first drafting this section, breaking news came that Israeli troops had raided and shut down seven Palestinian NGOs in the Palestinian city of Ramallah. Israel's Defense Ministry designated six of the targeted NGOs as "terror organizations." Oren Ziv, "Israel Storms Palestinian NGO Offices after Months-long Failure to Discredit Them," +972 Magazine, 18 August 2022, online at (972mag.com) [bit.ly/3zeRCV1](https://bit.ly/3zeRCV1) (accessed 10 October 2022). At least one of these NGOs, the Union of Palestinian Women Committees (UPWC) has done considerable documentation and activist work in Silwan and has supported the community in their fight against house demolition orders; online at [upwc.org.ps](http://upwc.org.ps) (accessed 21 September 2022).
- 31 Robert Johnston and Kimberley Marwood, "Action Heritage: Research, Communities, Social Justice," *International Journal of Heritage Studies* 23, no. 9 (2017): 816–31; Ann E. Killebrew, Dana DePietro, Reema Pangarkar, Shelley-Anne Peleg, Sandra Scham, and Evan Taylor, "Archaeology, Shared Heritage, and Community at Akko, Israel," *Journal of Eastern Mediterranean Archaeology and Heritage Studies* 5, no. 3–4 (October 2017): 365–92.
- 32 Chiara De Cesari, "Heritage between Resistance and Government in Palestine," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 49, no. 4 (2017): 747–52; Chiara De Cesari, "Creative Heritage: Palestinian Heritage NGOs and Defiant Arts of Government," *American Anthropologist* 112, no. 4 (2010): 625–37.
- 33 My emphasis. See [silwanic.net](http://silwanic.net), 2022, (accessed 21 September 2022).
- 34 See [www.madaasilwan.org](http://www.madaasilwan.org) (accessed 21 September 2022).
- 35 Susan Greene, "I Witness Silwan: Who is Watching Whom?" *Jerusalem Quarterly* 82 (Summer 2020): 154–67.
- 36 Some of the murals can be seen, with descriptions, online at [www.iwitnesssilwan.org](http://www.iwitnesssilwan.org) (accessed 21 September 2022).
- 37 Rachel Corrie was an American activist and member of the pro-Palestinian group International Solidarity Movement. In 2003, aged twenty-three, she was crushed by an Israeli armored bulldozer while trying to prevent the demolition of Palestinian houses in Rafah, Gaza. She later died of her injuries in hospital. See Rachel Corrie, *Let Me Stand Alone: The Journals of Rachel Corrie* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2008).
- 38 De Cesari, "Heritage between Resistance and Government," 747.
- 39 Erum Salam, "Black Lives Matter Protesters Make Palestinian Struggle Their Own," *Guardian*, 16 June 2021.
- 40 Falk, *Palestine's Horizon*.
- 41 Butler, "Efficacies of Heritage," 113–35.
- 42 "Edward Said Library," Madaa Silwan Creative Center website, online at [www.madaasilwan.org/en/1/8](http://www.madaasilwan.org/en/1/8) (accessed 21 September 2022). The limited impact of Silwan Reads was such that Nadera Shalhoub-Kevorkian wrote in a 2011 paper that "in Silwan . . . there is no library," in "E-resistance among Palestinian Women: Coping in Conflict-ridden Areas," *Social Service Review* 85, no. 2 (2011): 179–204.
- 43 Instagram allows business account holders to view the geographic demographics of a follower base.
- 44 Soueif, "The Dig Dividing Jerusalem"; C. Noy, "Narratives and Counter-Narratives"; Landy, "The Place of Palestinians." Their figures for visitors to the "City of David" include Israeli schoolchildren and soldiers. Since Noy and Soueif, visitor numbers at the "City of David" have likely fluctuated between tens and hundreds of thousands, particularly due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Figures for social media are accurate as of 14 September 2022.
- 45 Raja Abdulrahim, "Palestinian Flags Aren't Illegal in Israel. They Still Get Torn Down," *New York Times*, 30 July 2022, online at ([nytimes.com](https://nytimes.com)) [nyti.ms/3VCjPyi](https://nyti.ms/3VCjPyi) (accessed 21 September 2022).
- 46 Goodfriend, Bakri, and Sheikh Ahmad, "Expansion of Digital Surveillance in Jerusalem," 5–9.