# Going Underground

## The Meanings of Death and Burial for Minority Groups in Israel

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# Preface and acknowledgments

This book is about attitudes towards death and burial in contemporary society. It is intended for professional archaeologists and for ordinary people, as it includes information, personal experiences, ethical considerations and thoughts regarding death and archaeology in general.

Contemporary archaeology is different from the old science of archaeology, as it centers not only on physical things but also on more intangible ones, such as people's stories and thoughts. Contemporary archaeology, like traditional archaeology, adheres to strict scientific standards; however, it is also sensitive to living people, minorities, heritage and even the future of society. As such, it gives voice to the voiceless 'alterities,' on the one hand; and guards against the increasing devastation of both humans and things through 'super-modernity,' on the other.

In its commitment to the concerns of contemporary archaeology, this book provides information on the attitudes towards death and burial of several minority groups living in Israel today, including four communities of Russian Jews, an ultra-religious Jewish community and a Palestinian-Christian community. It also describes how the visual and verbal information on the attitudes towards death and burial of these communities was gathered. An important part of this description is the relationship between the interviewees and the author. The book ends with a discussion of the relevance and meaning of archaeology in general.

This book is relevant to professional archaeologists and anthropologists, but it is also aimed at all those interested in humanity's multiple attitudes towards death and burial.

# Chapter 1

# Reflections on death and burial

## Introduction

The first time I handled human bones was in the 1960s when I volunteered to be lowered into a deep pit in a cave. The pit was dark and airless, but I was thrilled to touch the 2000-year-old remains of the mythical people from the 'great war' between the Romans and the Jews. In the pit, I uncovered dozens of skeletons, which were later lifted in baskets to the surface of the cave. This was my first year at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem. I was young and fit and fearlessly ventured into the darkness. As a reward for descending into the shadows, Professor Yigael Yadin, the leader of the expedition, invited me to be present at the unveiling of the Bar Kochba letters also found in the cave. That was when I made up my mind to be an archaeologist like my professor.

A few years later, as a student at the University of Mexico, I unearthed a couple lying side by side. My supervisor pointed out the obvious differences between the female and male bones, which I did not know at the time. The position of the couple, lying together for eternity, touched my heart. Although only skeletons, they seemed in many ways still very human and vulnerable, and I felt close to them.

It must have been this closeness that enabled me to venture into the morgue and take a final farewell of my dead mother. Women in Israel do not usually identify the dead, but an immigrant from the former USSR who was in charge of the morgue that morning allowed me in. My mother, contrary to what I had expected, was very beautiful and calm.

As I had already bought her a burial plot when my father died, I successfully negotiated with the religious authorities responsible for Jewish burials (the *hevra kadisha*) for the kind of ceremony I wanted. At the time of my parents' deaths there was a public debate in Israel about opening alternative, secular cemeteries, and the members of the *hevra kadisha* in my town were making efforts to satisfy this desire. I, therefore, requested a minimal service that included the traditional religious treatment of the body and organized the ceremony myself. After the rabbi, who knew my intentions, left, we started the eulogy and played a concerto by Sibelius, which my mother could sing by heart. Although music is not normally played in Jewish cemeteries, those present remarked that the funeral was very beautiful and moving.

In many cultures, there is much concern for the dead. In the last quarter of the nineteenth century, the Jewish community in Jerusalem declared a fast and a day

of mourning in order to save the bones excavated by archaeologists in the Tombs of the Kings (Ben Asher 1874: 297–302; Shay 2008; see also Chapter 2). This concern is sometimes accompanied by antagonism towards archaeological activities, which finds expression in political lobbying and public rallies demanding the reburial of indigenous people, such as Native Americans and Australian Aborigines (Fforde *et al.* 2002; Pastron 1973; Winter 1980). This antagonism is, at times, accompanied by violent resistance to the digging up of graves as, for instance, in Latin America and Hawaii (Conteras 1973; Linnekin 1983: 246). The large collection of mummies in the Cairo Museum was also closed to the public by order of the president of Egypt, Anwar Sadat, because of concern for the dead (Baligh 1987).

Worries about desecration of the dead also extend to the unequal treatment of graves of different groups. It has been claimed that in Israel, for instance, Jewish graves are treated differently from Muslim graves. This led the famous architect Frank Gehry to withdraw from the prestigious Museum of Tolerance project in Jerusalem in 2010 because it was located on a Muslim cemetery. Similarly, a letter was sent by Arab student activists to Tel Aviv University in 2012 protesting against the building of a new students' dormitory which would desecrate Muslim graves. Nevertheless, the university authorities announced that the construction would continue, with the sponsorship of the Department of Antiquities (Levi 2012).

Another tense struggle has been going on for a number for years between the Israeli authorities and the Muslim residents of the village of Silwan over the rights to the Muslim cemetery at Bab al-Rahma, which adjoins the eastern wall of the Old City of Jerusalem at the foot of the Temple Mount. The Muslim villagers are not allowed to use the cemetery, as the authorities have declared it an archaeological site (Emek Shaveh 2012).

The different treatment accorded to the dead of different faiths is further indicated by the decision to conserve the first Jewish cemetery in Ajami, Jaffa, which dates from 1840, and turn it into a tourist site (Ettinger 2012). The reconstruction of the city's past undoubtedly obscures the fact that Jaffa, like other cities in Israel, was mainly Arab at the time (Shay 2016).

Debates over the desecration of bones take place in other countries, in particular with regard to international concerns for 'finding the fallen' that center on the need to locate soldiers who died in the wars of the twentieth century (Moshenska 2008: 167; Price 2011). Thus, for example, an active debate lasting for some time occurred over the desecration of a naval war grave by Odyssey Marine.[1] A similar debate took place around the remains of the *Titanic* (The Marker Café 2012). There is also concern for much older bones, such as those of a man who lived around 5000 years ago (Fforde *et al.* 2002: 12; Finn 2007: 26, 28; Shay 2008: 330) or the campaign for the reburial of the body of a prehistoric child dated to 5700 years ago. The latter was unsuccessful

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[1] Jon Price (archaeologist), email to author, 27 September 2016.

and the bones are displayed in the Alexander Keiller Museum in Avebury, Wiltshire, where they can be viewed by the public (Wallis and Blain 2011). Modern concerns for the dead have encouraged several archaeological organizations to adopt a more reflexive and ethical approach to digging up bones.

The archaeological discourse of the last few decades includes discussions of the acceptable limits of archaeological practice. On the one hand, few would doubt that mortuary practices have an important scientific value for archaeologists, who can study them to access people's lives and deaths in the past (Bahn 1996: 11); on the other, the apparent 'ghastly,' 'corpse-snatching' and 'tomb-robbing' nature of archaeological activity has exposed it to criticism. There is now an extensive archaeological literature debating the ethics of digging up, displaying and studying human remains (e.g. Finn 2007; Williams and Williams 2007). This literature has profoundly influenced my way of thinking, communicating and writing (see Chapter 6).

## Funerals and gender

As part of my interest in contemporary mortuary practices, a few years ago, I participated in a seminar for coordinators of alternative mourning rituals, organized by an institute for secular Jewish identity, called Avaya (Existence). The seminar included lectures, discussions and practical guidance on how to plan and conduct funeral ceremonies. About a dozen people attended the meetings, men and women who had already been involved in burial and mourning ceremonies. Our discussions covered the significance of ritual ceremonies (Turner 1969) and the division between secular and religious attitudes towards death and burial in Israel and its practical implications. Except for two immigrants from the former USSR who looked down on non-Jewish burial customs as 'abhorrent, noisy and vulgar,' most of the participants criticized the religious authorities for being insensitive to the pain suffered by the bereaved and disrespectful of the deceased. Others complained about religious customs that banned women from conducting the ceremonies (see below). Some participants protested against the 'pornography of death' in Western society that, as opposed to traditional cultures, considered death as repulsive – as other natural processes, such as birth and copulation, were a century ago (Ariès 1974: 85–93; Gorer 1965: 169).

This attitude towards death has made Jewish religious undertakers, who were once proud of their profession, reluctant to mention it in public for fear of being ostracized (Abramovitch 1998: 554). Their reluctance is not so very different from that depicted in Yōjirō Takita's film *Departures*, which won the Academy Award for the Best Foreign Language Film in 2009. The film describes the secret life of a Japanese undertaker who found a sense of fulfillment in his work and resisted his wife's urgings to give up his 'disgusting profession.' This uncomfortable attitude toward death is also reflected in the Hebrew and English languages, for example,

where the word 'to die' is often replaced by euphemisms such as 'to pass away' or 'to depart.'

During the last part of the Avaya seminar, we were asked to plan our own funerals. Only a few participants succeeded in accomplishing this task, possibly, as some philosophers have observed, because it is hard for a human being to accept the fact that one day they will no longer be alive (Heidegger [1927] 1962; Levinas [1993] 2000; Levy 2008: 39–48, 187–188). This 'denial' of one's own death, perhaps lessens as one approaches it and understands what is lying ahead. This coincides with my own experience: not long ago, I was summoned to the hospital to say farewell to my dying friend, Rani. We were both calm and discussed mundane and personal matters related to her coming death. I also told her about the first chapter of this book that dealt with various attitudes towards death and gave her a copy of it, which she read. At the hospital and later, I was puzzled that, although there was no uncertainty about her death, we were not even slightly sad at the event. Was it because her acceptance of what lay ahead produced a shared intimacy we had never experienced before? Or was it the proximity to death that made us feel very much alive and elated by the stupendous event of our conversation. Later, I was told by mutual friends that they had had the same experience of ecstasy and even consolation. Although some members of Rani's family did not, I felt bonded to her for a long time after her death,[2] above all by writing and rewriting this paragraph, which I consider to be her obituary.

Toward the end of the Avaya seminar, I attended an alternative non-religious funeral. The ceremony had been planned as a 'closing event' in the life of an old person (Levy 2008: 13, 32). It conformed with the world of the deceased and his companions, who had served in the Israeli Air Force. The oneness created by the coordinator between the deceased and the mourners, who would not escape their own deaths, produced a spiritual and moving ceremony.

Since the atmosphere in the seminar was very friendly, I urged some members to confide in me and explain their motives for confronting what was usually considered a disturbing topic. I received diverse answers: some confessed that this was their way to challenge death 'as sportsmen of extreme sports sometimes do'; others saw it as a way to address their fear of death, hoping, like Seneca, the Roman Stoic philosopher (4 BC – AD 65), that constant communication with death would prepare them for this inevitable event (Levy 2008: 13, 16).

My overall impression from the seminar was that the participants, like Jewish undertakers in the past (Abramovitch 1998: 554), were driven by an aspiration to offer profound help to mourners in their crisis at the departure of their loved ones.

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[2] The bond of the living with the dead is not unusual and has historical precedence in recurrent ritual ceremonies (Van Gennep 1960: 146–165).

Following the Avaya seminar, I attended a conference at Tel Aviv University called Women, Gender and Rituals that discussed, among other topics, death rituals. According to Jewish tradition, women may watch over the dead, wash female bodies (Lamm 2000: 281–282) and, in the past, also lamented at funerals (Danforth 1982: 71; Madar 2006). This minimal and passive participation of women in funerals infuriates both secular and religious activists (El-Or 1998: 311), who would like to see them take a more active part in such death rituals, especially in reciting the *Kaddish*, the most significant Jewish mourning prayer, which is the primary obligation placed upon the sons of the deceased (Lamm 2000: 144). Hence, a religious activist at the conference recited her will where she requested the female members of her family to take an active part in her funeral and to recite the *Kaddish*. The will was written with the consent of her rabbi (Pinhasi 2009).

I recently attended a secular funeral of a beloved cousin at the alternative cemetery in Kibbutz Einat. My cousin was a wealthy, public figure, who had purchased five burial plots at the time of his young grandson's death. The grave of the grandson (who shared my name) was marked by a tombstone carved from a natural basalt boulder brought from the Golan Heights. However, it was not oriented towards Jerusalem, as dictated by Jewish tradition, and, also contrary to Jewish tradition, a low fence with a bench next to it surrounded the five burial plots, separating them from the rest of the cemetery to emphasize that this was a private section. A gardener tends the five plots. In the past I used to visit this cemetery once a year in order to show my students the different cultural features reflected in burial practices. Each time I visited my family's lot, I found new architectural embellishments that the family had added. The non-religious ceremony conducted for my cousin was held by his two sons. At the appropriate moment I took the shovel, alongside some of the men from the family, and added soil to the grave. I found great comfort in this physical act, and I understood better the feminist activists who would like to take a more active part in Jewish burials.

## Field trips

In order to understand people's reactions to death, I joined in some field trips to the older cemeteries of Haifa that were organized and supported by the municipality. These cemeteries, which demonstrate the rich and varied history of the city during the nineteenth century and the early twentieth century, are included today within the city boundaries. In the past, however, they were situated on the western outskirts of the city. They include a dilapidated nineteenth-century Jewish cemetery divided into two plots: one for Western Jews (Ashkenazim) and the other for Oriental Jews (Sephardim), a division still in use today in a few cemeteries of the country (Feinberg 2009). Not far from the entrance, there is the grave of a rabbi from the third century AD, which has become a focal point for pilgrimage today and was frequented by many people during the Lebanon War of 2006. A little way to the west is a cemetery for the German dead of the First World War and German Protestants from the Templar colony who settled in Haifa in 1868. Next to it is a third cemetery

for military and government officials of British Mandatory Palestine which existed from 1920 to 1948 (Figure 1.1). The tour guide praised the British for allowing the dead of numerous faiths and various origins to be buried side by side, unlike the ethnic differentiation of Western and Eastern Jews in the Jewish cemetery.

I visited the British cemetery once more in 2010 for a ceremony in memory of the Indian soldiers of the British Army who died at the Battle of Haifa in 1918, which wrested the city from the Ottomans (Aderet 2012). The cemetery contains a memorial to the Hindu soldiers, whose ashes had been cast into the holy rivers of India, and a burial ground for the Muslim soldiers. The ceremony, which was the first to be held in Haifa but which had been held for decades in India, was very colorful and attended by relatives of the deceased and representatives of various armies (Figure 1.2). The German and British cemeteries, surrounded by greenery and well tended, made a good impression on the participants of the tour who compared them to the neglected Jewish cemetery. However, all military cemeteries in Israeli are well tended, not only because people still remember their occupants but also because the dead soldiers are 'our sons' according to the Israeli ethos (Almog 1998: 226).

The second organized tour I took taught me more about people's reactions to death. We visited another old cemetery in Haifa, which had been in use from around 1935, after an even older one had been closed down. It contains a well-tended British cemetery from the Second World War and a Jewish cemetery. Walking to the British plots from the main road we passed a decorous gate with golden letters announcing that the cemetery belonged to 'Messianic Jews' (a movement that emerged in the 1960s and combines elements of Christianity and Judaism). To my surprise, the sign annoyed several participants of the tour who objected to the missionary intentions of the community. However, the focal point of the tour was several tombs of public interest in the Jewish cemetery dating close to the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948.

One of these graves is a communal burial of 250 Jewish refugees from Romania caught by the British in 1940 on their way to Palestine who were mistakenly killed by the Jewish paramilitary organization, Haganah, which had planted a bomb on their boat, the *Patria* (Wikipedia 2020). The grave is marked by a few rows of identical, simple, traditional Jewish low tombstones with the names of the deceased engraved on them. At the back is a memorial with the Star of David carved on it. Behind this communal burial site, there is another for 39 Jewish workers at British oil refineries who were killed by Arabs in 1947. This attack followed (incidentally or deliberately) an attack on the same day by the Jewish militant organization, Etzel, which killed a group of Arab workers at the entrance to the refineries (Avizur 1985: 232). Communal burial sites and memorials are important elements of the 'bereavement culture' characteristic of the cult of modern nationality (Anderson 1991; Mosse 1990). The use of a simple, traditional Jewish design for the identical tombs produces an emotional response in the observer and feelings of closeness to the unknown deceased (Shay 2004: 298).

Next, we visited a few burial sites which had elements common to military cemeteries. The deceased were either from pre-state Jewish organizations or had been killed by Jewish organizations on suspicion of collaboration with the British forces. The tour guide, a Defense Ministry retiree who had served in the Israeli naval commando unit in his youth (Segev 2009), enthusiastically acquainted us with the stories of each burial. The stories, however, were unrelated to the historic circumstances surrounding the deaths of these people. Only later did I learn that, according to the guide, the connecting thread of the stories was the Israeli ethos of sacrifice for the land in order to redeem the Jews from the miserable circumstances of exile (Almog 1998: 231; Kimmerling 2004: 83). These victims, furthermore, formed an 'imagined community' (Anderson 1991) with whom many Israelis, such as the guide with his particular background and maybe some of the participants, associated in order to maintain their collective identity (Shay 2005: 712).

During that tour I also noticed that while most of the graves were oriented according to Jewish tradition toward Jerusalem (see above; Shay 2004), some were not, but followed the topography of the cemetery. This orientation of graves, I found out later, is acceptable in the Jewish religion only in Israel and emphasizes the importance of the 'Holy Land.'

In another tour organized by the Haifa Museum in downtown Haifa we came across a long-forgotten cemetery hidden behind a high wall. It dates from the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth and belongs to a Palestinian community. In spite of my sincere intentions to commemorate the dead of this cemetery, I have failed to engage adequately with the living relatives whose perceptions and concerns for their loved ones were different from mine. Although I was upset at the time, I fully accept their cultural values (see Chapter 5).

## Courses on death and burial

There are now a few thousand university courses on death and dying (Levy 2008: 14). For many years I have conducted a seminar for undergraduate students on death and burial. The first time I taught the seminar was the hardest, since the students, a group of female nurses, were interested less in understanding diverse human responses to death and more in overcoming their daily confrontation with it. In later courses, I was concerned that students would choose nationalistic topics that I was not sure I could handle in the lecture hall. But this occurred only once and the student involved was sensitive enough to focus on the settlers in the occupied territories' love and care for their relatives and avoid other issues. The seminar included a review of several approaches to death and burial, a field trip to a secular cemetery in order to observe different approaches to death and some anthropological films, including one on second burial customs in Borneo.

At the beginning of each year many students felt uncomfortable with the topic, in particular with the field trip to the cemetery and the film about second burials in

Borneo. Some tried to avoid the field trip, citing religious reasons why they could not enter a cemetery: an excuse which, in most cases, was false. At the end of each year, however, many students, including the nurses from the first year, discovered the beauty of the diverse approaches of humanity to death and burial. They sometimes even took their families and children to visit the cemetery on which they wrote their final thesis.

## Indigenous archaeology

Although I trained as a traditional archaeologist of early periods with an empirically grounded and culturally sensitive approach, the development of archaeology, especially postmodern and postcolonial archaeology, has influenced me to become involved in what has become the indigenous (postcolonial) approach (Nicholas 2014; Shay 2016).[3] I have become aware not only of the subjective nature of archaeology but also of the inequalities and power differentials that exist within it. In Spain (González-Ruibal 2007: 207), Poland (Polonsky and Michlic 2004: 2) and Israel (Shay 2016), for instance, when events of the immediate past are still controversial, the conflicting parties are 'deaf and blind' to the traumatic past of the other side, and as a result the historical remains of the dominated sides are not considered worth preserving.

Contrary to traditional archaeology, the archaeologies of the contemporary past have a responsibility towards society and towards the troubled heritage of recent history. Contemporary archaeologists, thus, work against the concealment of different pasts and point out the connections between the past and the present. By making things public, contemporary archaeologists add a tangible experiential dimension to our knowledge of history and make us remember that 'evil was here' (Bauman 2001; Sontag 2003). For the sake of conserving recent historical remains, contemporary archaeology has foregrounded the question of whether there is an agreed date after which it could be said that they are no longer dealing with archaeology (Baily 2007; Bradley 1991; González-Ruibal *et. al* 2014; Holdaway and Wandsnider 2008; Ingold 2010; Lucas 2004, 2005; Olivier 2004). Furthermore contemporary archaeology inquires how far it can go with the archaeology of the present. Consequently, over the past decade, a diverse literature on the archaeologies of the future has developed (Adam 2010; Altman 2018; Crossland 2015; Harrison 2016; Harrison and Schofield 2009; Ingold 2010). The potential for expanding the field in the future depends on scientific and technological innovations (Jones 2010) and on moral questions, such as the impact of the dominant notions of heritage on local communities (Chapter 6; González-Ruibal 2008; González-Ruibal *et al.* 2011; Holtorf 2018; Oliver 2015).

The emergence of postcolonial criticism in the last quarter of the twentieth century challenges the hegemonic assumptions about both the objective nature

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[3] There are two concepts closely associated with indigenous archaeology, 'third space' and 'diaspora,' that have been used at the end of the twentieth century and subsequently in relation to the emergence of postcolonialism (Al Sayyad 2001; Clifford 1999: 302; Shay 2016: 75–76).

of archaeological inquiry (Nicholas 2012) and the seemingly binary opposition between the 'superior' dominant culture and the 'inferior' non-modern ones of colonized 'Others' (Hazan and Monterescu 2011: 188, 246; Said 1978). By defying hegemonic ideas, postcolonial approaches embrace the methodological claims that contemporary archaeology should give voice to previously silenced and marginalized peoples who, all too often, have had little influence over decisions regarding their heritage (Haber 2012: 55–66; Nicholas 2012; Parizot 2012). The growing public awareness of their values, knowledge, practices and ethics gives indigenous communities a new image far from the former colonial idea of rooted populations tied to non-modern and non-Western ways of life and forms of knowledge (Bhabha 1994; Shepherd and Haber 2011: 98). By highlighting disruption and resistance to prevailing cultures by minority groups (Liebmann and Rizvi 2008: 5), the historical experiences of indigenous communities are brought into the postmodern gaze and provide us with new knowledge about the past (Hastrup 1992: 124–128; Ladon and Rizvi 2010; Leone 2010; Prakash 1999; Tyler 1986).

A couple of examples will illustrate the critical perspectives of this critique: the San activism to safeguard their rock art against government developments in South Africa (AURA 2000: 43) and the ultra-religious activism against archaeological digs in Israel are seen not as the opposition of 'timeless' people to modern science but as a challenge to the hegemonic ideas of the state and the defense of religious beliefs (Chapter 5; Shay 2018). I also witnessed a range of attitudes of resistance by migrants from the former USSR toward their marginalization by the State of Israel, which prevents them from exercising what they consider to be their basic right to bury their loved ones in the official state cemeteries. Their opposition includes a range of verbal, symbolic, juridical and physical activities (Chapters 3, 4; Shay 2012: 42).

The ideas of postcolonial archaeology have persuaded scholars to research contemporary issues, such as the Holocaust (Sturdy Colls 2012) and the current Sudanese–Ethiopian borderland case (González-Ruibal 2018). My increasing interest in contemporary indigenous archaeology has made the Palestinian remains from the Ottoman and British Mandate periods in my hometown more significant to me, and I have devoted considerable time to researching them and to collecting the testimonies of Palestinian residents (Shay 2008, 2016).

As mentioned above, the development of postcolonial archaeology influenced me to become involved in indigenous archaeology (see, however, Smith 1999). Accordingly, most of my studies of death and burial have been widely seen as representing indigenous issues (see also Fforde et al. 2002). In the early 1980s, I studied and interviewed the ultra-religious community, which opposed archaeological digs. Through my relationship with this community, I became aware, for the first time, of the inequalities and power differentials that existed within my vocation, which used to look down on the ultra-religious as a pre-modern and illogical people (Shay 1992). Later, I conducted research on the death and burial of other displaced and dispossessed communities, including a group of Palestinians and immigrants from the former USSR.

## The change of ideas

When I started to think about writing this book during my last sabbatical, I realized that, as I had been studying the topics of death and burial for many years, my perceptions of reality had changed. At first, I followed the paradigmatic outlook of American mortuary archaeology, which assumed that social organization was the primary determinant of mortuary practices (Binford 1971; Carr 1995; Morris 1987; Saxe 1971; Shay 1983; Tainter 1978; Trigger 1989). On the basis of this assumption I formed several hypotheses to be checked against the empirical data concerning, first, the cemetery in Jericho at the end of the third millennium BC and, later, contemporary cemeteries (Shay 2004).

This paradigmatic approach to mortuary practices, which started in the 1970s, created 'an epistemological break,' in Louis Althusser's words (1969: 220), which clashed with the former archaeological interpretation that attached cultural–historical significance to mortuary practices (Shay 2008). In spite of this epistemological break, both interpretations of mortuary practices were equally grounded in empirical data. Furthermore, both cultural–historical and social assumptions persist in the twenty-first century. For example, Elizabeth Bloch-Smith (2003) identified three typical types of burials in the southern Levant at the end of the third millennium, representing, first, sedentary highland culture; second, foreign, possibly Indo-European, culture; and third, pastoral culture. In contrast with the above, others (Baker 2010: 5; Steen 2005) have recently started to employ the social interpretation of mortuary burials, with Yitzhak Paz (2014) using my own arguments for the cemetery in Jericho (Shay 1983).

Before moving to the next development in the archaeology of death, which occurred during the 1990s, I would like to examine the paradigm that mortuary practices are influenced by social factors, an approach which is still partly in use today. It assumes that three social and cultural concepts receive recognition on the occasion of death (Shay 2004, 2005). The first is the 'Social Persona' (Goodenough 1965) of the deceased, representing the composite of social identities that they maintained during their lifetime and are recognized as significant on the occasion of death. The second is the affirmation of the broader 'Communal Values' of the group, such as the orientation of Jewish burials toward Jerusalem. The third is the 'Opportunity of Death,' which refers to the different and sometimes contested declarations made on the paramount occasion of death (Shay 1983: 291).

The sciences are characterized by a permanent process of reorientation and rearranging of the boundaries between what is thought to be known and what is beyond imagination (Rheinberger 1997: 11). Hence, the change in my perceptions on mortuary practices was gradual and affected by both the development of archaeology (especially postcolonial archaeology) and the testimonies that I heard from relatives of the deceased. This gradual process started with my article on the memorialization of victims of 'hostile activities against Israel' (Shay 2005: 711–713),

where I emphasized the ephemeral concept of the 'Opportunity of Death' above other social dimensions. This concept discredited former strategies related to ideas of essentialist cultures and of permanent, social constructions, while focusing on the conflicting individual manifestations of whether or not to consider these victims as political symbols.

Through this gradual process, I came to realize that the reality of death and burial is more complex than considering either the cultural–historical or the social interpretations as the primary determinants of mortuary practices. It was perhaps Bruno Latour's insight (1987) that there was nothing to gain by substituting the natural referents of scientific activity, which were behind the cultural–historical paradigm of archaeology, for social conditions, which supported the functional–social explanation in archaeology. As a result, many scholars (e.g. Carr 1995: 188; Hodder 1987: 50, 55; Renfrew 1994; Shay 2001) have called for broader approaches that use cult and religion in order to interpret archaeological material, including mortuary practices. Caroline Sturdy Colls (2012), for example, suggested that the philosophical–religious beliefs mentioned by Robert Hertz (1907), which lost their academic importance in the study of mortuary practices during the third quarter of the twentieth century, should be reconsidered as additional determinants to the study of mortuary practices in the present.

I have tried to apply the theoretical developments in archaeology to my inquiries on death and burial. Hence, I abandoned my study of ancient periods and concentrated on contemporary peoples, including ultra-religious Jews, immigrants to Israel from the former USSR and Palestinian minority groups, in order to publicize their concealed past. Through my research on their cemeteries and the testimonies of the relatives of the deceased, I have tried to comprehend the links connecting each group's individual experience of death and its unique historical, temporal and spatial context (see Chapter 6; Deleuze [1969] 1994). This singular experience is, in fact, analogous to an earlier concept from the postcolonial critique: 'hybridity.' According to Homi Bhabha (1994), 'hybridity' derived from the mixing of elements from the traditions of the minority group with those of the dominant culture and those that disrupt and challenge it (see Chapter 6).

To conclude: the first chapter of *Going Underground* introduces a discussion on the 'archaeology of death' based on my intellectual and emotional experiences. The intellectual experience, on the one hand, consists of my endeavors to extend the boundaries of the indigenous/postcolonial/singular approaches and to merge them with the archaeology of death and my scientific analysis of material remains and oral information relating to funerary practices. My emotional experience, on the other hand, is related to my personal reactions to the dialogues that I conducted with relatives of the deceased who taught me about love and sensibility towards our ancestors and people in general. Furthermore, Chapter 1 mentions my experience of handling human bones. Confronted by archaeologists who may have been influenced by postmodern ethical approaches and feel aghast at archaeological

grave digging, I conclude that I am not repulsed by death. My contact with ancient human bones, as well as my dialogue with the relatives of the deceased, makes me closer to my kinsmen and aware of the time that has passed. My experience with ancient bones reminds me of an earlier archaeologist, Jacquetta Hawkes (1949), who wrote in the early 1940s of the kinship she felt with a dead skeleton uncovered on Mount Carmel: 'woman, whose ancient cloak of flesh I wear.'

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Figure 1.1 British Cemetery, Haifa

Figure 1.2 Ceremony for Indian soldiers, British Cemetery, Haifa