

Art's failure to generate urban renewal: Lessons from Jerusalem

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Abstract

Based on fieldwork conducted in a seam line neighbourhood in Jerusalem, this article contributes to the ongoing discourse on art in public spaces as a generator of urban renewal. The article suggests that re-thinking this convention from a Global South perspective would enable us to critically discuss the relation between art in public spaces and urban renewal. This research shows how site-specific intervention art activities had produced a conflict that consequently led to the expulsion of the artists group from the neighbourhood. Three theoretical concepts from Hannah Arendt's work were used in the analysis of the results: political/social, action and public realm. This article claims that the artists' group has aspired to be simultaneously 'social' and 'political': by means of a political act they wished to create a 'dialogue' and a 'meeting point' with Palestinians residing in East Musrara. Every attempt to be simultaneously political and social was perceived by the neighbourhood representatives as deceitful and threatening.

Keywords

art in public space, conflict, Global South, Hannah Arendt, urban renewal

摘要

学界认为，公共空间中的艺术推动了城市更新。本文根据在耶路撒冷的一个接缝线式社区开展的实地调查，就这一持续的讨论提出了新的观点。文章指出，从南半球的角度重新思考这一道理，将使我们能够批判地讨论公共空间中的艺术与城市更新之间的关系。本研究表明，特定地点的干预式艺术活动如何产生冲突，从而导致艺术家团体被驱逐出社区。我们在对研究结果的分析中运用了汉娜·阿伦特（Hannah Arendt）的三个理论概念：政治/社会领域、行动领域和公共领域。本文指出，艺术家团体渴望既是“社会”的，又是“政治”的：通过政治行动，他们希望与居住在东穆斯拉拉的巴勒斯坦人建立“对话”和“交汇点”。社区代表认为，任何同时指向政治和社会的企图都是诡计和威胁。

关键词

公共空间中的艺术、冲突、南半球、汉娜·阿伦特、城市更新

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This article tells the story of the failure of a group of artists who believed in the power of public art to facilitate urban regeneration.

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Its members founded a non-profit organisation called Muslala and moved into a neighbourhood located on the 'seam line' between East and West Jerusalem. Their aim was to effect change by reestablishing social and spatial relations between the two parts of the city, using workshops, exhibits and festivals, but the project ultimately collapsed. Rather than producing urban regeneration, the performance of public art in this case led to conflict. This ethnography of the conflict between the artists of Muslala and the local neighbourhood committee, and their different attitudes towards art, plays out on the western side of the urban seam line and tells the story of a conflict between two groups of Jews struggling over the 'right' way to face East Jerusalem and its Palestinian residents. For this reason, it does not presume to offer a balanced study of the conflict between Jews and Palestinians.

Over the past three decades, the field of urban studies has come to perceive art as a tool for urban change (Sharp et al., 2005). Art performance in public space has been addressed by the ongoing discussion on urban renewal (Garcia, 2004), which has created a new theoretical language of symbolic economy. In this subfield, creativity has been understood as urban capital and incorporated into the notion of the creative city (Florida, 2002). Moreover, the idea that culture can advance economic and urban development lies at the heart of urban policies and cultural master plans (Nakagawa, 2010; Markusen and Gadwa, 2010). Urban scholars, however, have voiced critical perspectives and posed questions about how art might also be furthering gentrification (Ley, 2003) and social exclusion (Shaw et al., 2011), with recent publications also discussing what impact, if any, public art has on a city's economy (Morgan and Xuefei, 2012; Polèse, 2012; Waitt and Gibson, 2009). On the level of both knowledge and practice, special attention has been paid to public art that can be defined as:

... art which has as its goal a desire to engage with its audiences and to create spaces – whether material, virtual or imagined – within which people can identify themselves, perhaps by creating a renewed reflection on community, on the uses of public spaces ... (Sharp et al., 2005: 1003–1004)

The notion of site-specific art marked a step forward in defining the relations between (urban) space and art, as its:

... aim was not only to accommodate the changing artistic trends of the period but to align public art more with the production of public amenities and site-oriented projects. What this amounted to in essence was a mandate for public art to be more like architecture and environmental design. (Kwon, 2002: 67)

In this article I consider what happens when the ideal of public art as a tool of urban regeneration manifests itself in the Global South. By raising this question, I am joining a research community who 'offer a critical insight into how public art and architecture contribute or otherwise to the social cohesion of the city' (Sharp et al., 2005: 1003). Perhaps the most unique aspect of this article is its embedding of this question in the concrete conditions of a city from the Global South.

This perception of art as a catalyst for change was formulated in First World countries and then spread across the globe (Nakagawa, 2010), and considering it in the context of ethno-national conflict reveals the limits of current academic insight into the significance of art intervention in public space. Jerusalem's urban seam line as a concrete arena provides us with a unique opportunity to analyse the ways in which people take action among 'others' and how they cope with social multiplicity. As a scholar of urban sociology, I am particularly interested in the spatial and social conditions in which Muslala, the group of artists in question,

operated. Notions such as the 'creative class' as an agent of urban change cannot be discussed only as a universal strategy but must also be interpreted in local context. In other words, the performance of public art in a city rife with conflict and terrorism cannot be understood in the same manner as public art performed elsewhere. This challenge lies at the heart of the 'southern turn' that has permeated urban studies and that continues to challenge Euro-American planning theory (Bayat, 2000; Watson, 2009). Although this continually evolving body of knowledge is not the focus of this article, it nonetheless inhabits the core of my anthropological approach of enabling the emergence of new theories by bringing ethnography (of the Global South) and the people's language to the forefront (Comaroff and Comaroff, 2012), as opposed to imposing concepts and theories on them – or, in Connell's (2013: 211) words, by seeing the 'postcolonial periphery as a site of knowledge production'. Thinking about cities from the perspective of the Global South enables us to address social phenomena in cities from a different angle and, by doing so, not only increase our knowledge but also, and primarily, enrich our theoretical toolbox, which currently suffers from a Western bias (Rigg, 2007: 6). By doing so, we are engaging in the decolonisation of social thought (Connell, 2013).

Arendt, in her biography and her theoretical work, challenges the boundaries between German philosophy and Jewish philosophy, between Germany as her homeland and the fact that she was doomed to be a refugee, and between her role in the Zionist enterprise and her disappointment in it. She produced her writings at home, within the academy, in prison and in refugee camps – in Germany, France, the US and Israel. Her theory of the 'uprooted' (Arendt, 1943) offers a good starting point for challenging Euro-American authority in academia and, in the case of this article, for suspending the familiar theory of

regeneration and urban renewal and delving deeply into the notion of politics.

This article contributes to the ongoing project of 'Theory from the South' by considering whether the creative class theory is useful in understanding the real urbanism of Jerusalem as a divided city, as both a theory and a theme.

The divided city, in which internal borders are drawn according to sharp ethno-national and class cleavages (Auga et al., 2005; Bollens, 1998; Marcuse, 2009), lies at the heart of this research. Segregation is deeply embedded in the history, architecture and sociology of the divided city (Monterescu, 2011; Piroyanski, 2014; Ram and Aharon-Gutman, 2017). The academic community proposes a wide range of concepts with which to understand the way in which social groups of difference organise the borders and the points of meeting between them, including mixed cities, divided cities, cities of conflict and contested cities, to name a few. Each concept emphasises a different dimension of the organisation of the many in the city.

Since the 1990s, scholars have portrayed Jerusalem as an urban colonial space characterised by segregation and the construction of boundaries (Samman, 2013). The divided cities of the Balkans, the Middle East and Europe are demographically partitioned along ethno-national lines, designating them as global sites of contest, conquest and compromise. Five of the most well-known cities of this kind – Belfast, Beirut, Jerusalem, Nicosia and Mostar – have long been flash-points of international conflict between states characterised by oppositional national identities and strategies (Allegra et al., 2012). According to Boal (2005), people demand segregation for a number of reasons. One is the fact that segregation enables them to avoid 'the other' and to create comfort zones and a relaxed atmosphere (Boal, 2005: 66). Another, based on an analysis relying on

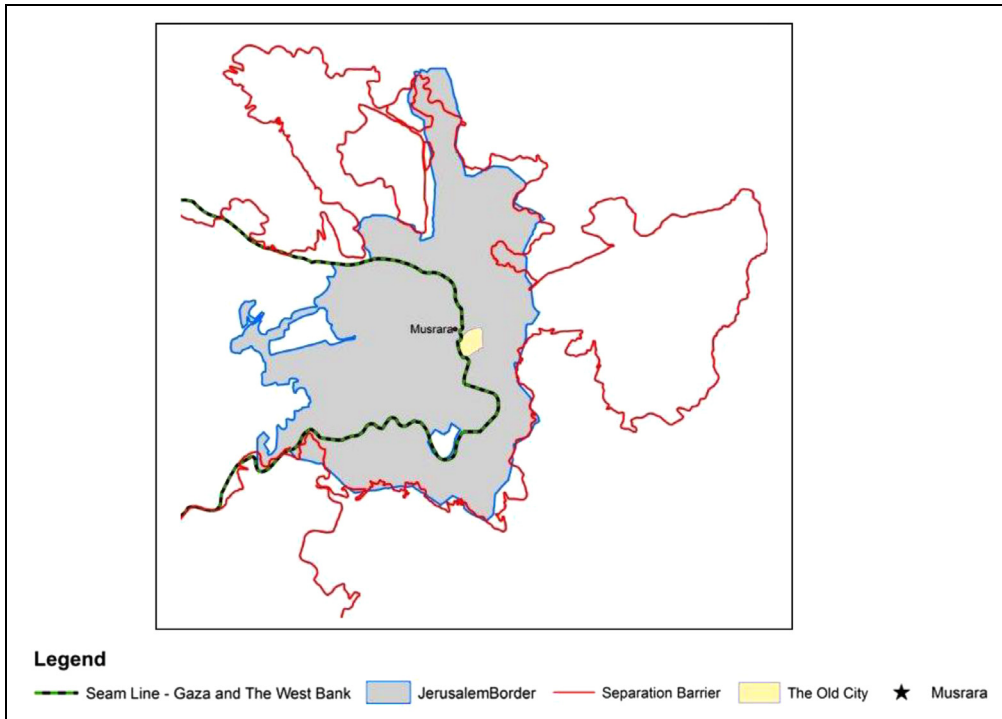


Figure 1. The Green Line, presented in three different scales.

fundamental theoretical components of sociology, that views bordering as a crucial practice of group building, is the fact that segregation enables people to attack and to struggle for their own interests. Segregation, Boal (2005: 68) maintains, is about cultural preservation that enables ethnic entrepreneurship, among other things. Ethnic segregation characterised by boundaries provides residents with security and comfort (Sibley, 1995: 32). The need to define and fence built environments is immediate and meaningful, for as Sibley (1995: 77) claims poignantly: ‘Spatial purification is a key feature in the organization of clean space’.

Jerusalem is a divided city (Benvenisti, 1996; Hasson, 2004) whose borders have been under continuous struggle. Moreover, the city shapes the geopolitics of the area

(Yacobi and Pullan, 2014), as well as its demography (Savitch and Garb, 2006). We can currently speak of three main borders of Jerusalem (see Figure 1).

The first is the municipal border, and the second is the separation wall (a six metre-high wall with checkpoints) (Savitch and Garb, 2006). The routes of these two borders sometimes intersect and sometimes do not, creating the paradoxical effect of positioning some parts of Jerusalem’s Arab / Palestinian neighbourhoods on the other side of the separation wall and thereby disconnecting them from Jerusalem.

The third border – the one at the core of our discussion – is the seam line (in green on the map). During the 1948 war, Jerusalem was divided between Israel and Jordan, and the ‘Green Line’ in Jerusalem marks the

route of the previous international border that divided the city between 1948 and 1967. During this period, this border was marked by a seven kilometre-long fence that was constructed in the centre of the city (Narkis, 1986). The term 'East Jerusalem', which emerged after the division of the city in 1948, included the 6000 square kilometres of the Jordanian city that were annexed to the municipal area of Israeli Jerusalem following its occupation during the Six-Day War of 1967 (Khamaisi et al., 2005). Following the war, the fences and mines were removed and Israel made substantial efforts to mould a united city – a policy that was criticised as the 'Judaization' of Jerusalem through control and urban planning. Although no physical barrier remains along this historical seam line today, it nonetheless remains a border area in terms of class, ethnicity and nationality.

Musrara is a neighbourhood located along the western side of the seam line. Originally established in 1889 by local wealthy Palestinian Arabs, Musrara today is home to approximately 4500 residents, consisting primarily of Mizrahi Jews, i.e. Arab-Jews (Hever and Shenhav, 2010), who emigrated to Israel from Middle Eastern and North African countries in the 1950s and settled in the neighbourhood's abandoned Arab homes. In more recent years, spurred by a project to revitalise the area, young professionals and families from Jerusalem have bought property in Musrara, and ultraorthodox Jewish families have also relocated there from nearby overcrowded neighbourhoods.

Understanding Muslala's failure to create change in Musrara required consideration of the meaning of the performance of art in public spaces in cities of conflict and multiplicity, and in this context I made use of Hannah Arendt's theoretical language as expressed primarily in *The Human Condition* (1958). On this basis, I maintain that the breakdown of Muslala's ideal stemmed from

the fact that the artists involved strove to meld two types of opposing strategies that neighbourhood residents had adopted as a way of organising East-West relations. As I will show below, the artists sought to be political by engaging in open-ended activities with the potential for facilitating human encounters with the 'other'. Through the performance of art in the public sphere, they sought to create meeting points with the 'other' – the Palestinian residents of East Jerusalem. In this manner, they hoped to initiate public discussion of new possibilities for everyday life in the neighbourhood. Simultaneously, they also sought to have social impact, by consolidating different groups in the neighbourhood into one community. It was important for them to identify themselves with the long-time Mizrahi Jewish residents of the neighbourhood, as their claim of being part of this 'community' was a basic condition for receiving legitimacy to operate in the neighbourhood and for receiving the attention and resources they needed to do so. Some of the artists even moved into Musrara. Ultimately, however, they failed to recognise the ways in which the political and the social can be conflicting forces and therefore evoked strong reactions among neighbourhood residents, who felt they were being deceived and threatened, and neighbourhood leaders, who accused the Muslala artists of engaging in the fraught politics of Israeli-Palestinian relations. For this reason, their presence eventually led not to regeneration but to conflict.

We can better understand this rupture, I argue, by applying Arendt's understanding of the political to public art activities, especially the ways in which it was impossible to predict an outcome. I therefore use Arendt's analysis of the political as a means of understanding the accusations that the artists were engaging in politics.

I begin by discussing Arendt's theoretical definitions of action, the public realm and



Figure 2. The ‘meeting point’ watermelon stand. On the right: with the sign in Arabic.

Source: Photograph by David Behar Perahia.

the political/social distinction, and then present my ethnographic work in Musrara – on both the urban history of the neighbourhood and the key individuals involved in the conflict – as the contextual framework for understanding Musrara’s activity in the neighbourhood. My analysis focuses on a specific initiative – the ‘watermelon stand’ (their ‘meeting point’; see Figure 2) – and the different interpretations of this intervention art activity by the performers on the one hand, and the community administration on the other. It was the gap between these interpretations, I maintain, that gave rise to the conflict that led to the artists’ consequent expulsion from the neighbourhood. In the final section I return to Arendt’s theory in the interpretation of the study findings.

Vita activa in Jerusalem

Arendt’s concepts and theoretical language have long informed scholars of urban spaces in their thinking about topics such as political violence and activism in public spaces. Here, I focus on three concepts that Arendt discusses in *The Human Condition*: action, the public realm and the distinction between the political and the social.

At the heart of *The Human Condition* is the concept of ‘the active life’, which Arendt refers to using the Latin term *vita activa* (Arendt, 1998: 12–16). She distinguishes between three fundamental forms of activity: labour (cyclical activity meant to satisfy essential survival needs), work (activity that creates objects and builds the world) and action (activity that is not linked to matter but only to relations between people). According to Arendt (1998: 6):

Action, the only activity that goes on directly between men without the intermediary of things or matter, corresponds to the human condition of plurality ... While all aspects of the human condition are somehow related to politics, this plurality is specifically *the* condition – not only the *conditio sine qua non*, but the *conditio per quam* – of all political life.

‘All human activities are conditioned by the fact that men live together’, Arendt holds, ‘but it is only action that cannot even be imagined outside the society of men’ (Arendt, 1998: 21).

Arendt distinguishes between the performance of a ceremony or custom that has set patterns, time periods and sites, and the

performance of an action, whose only predetermined feature is that it takes place in public (Azulai and Ophir, 2013). An action is always perceived as a new beginning whose consequences cannot be known in advance. The actors themselves cannot know what the action will lead to and how long the results will last. Since action is a noble expression of the liberty to perform and act in public, it is also an expression of the actor's complete dependency on those among whom he or she acts. The action's outcome is tenuous as a result of this dependency (Azulai and Ophir, 2013).

According to Arendt, an action consists of words and deeds. Words in this case refer not to functional speech, which occurs in the realms of labour and work, but rather to speech followed by action that then gives rise, publicly, to the question: 'Who are you?' (Arendt, 1998: 177). 'In acting and speaking, men show who they are, reveal actively their unique personal identities and thus make their appearance in the human world ...' (Arendt, 1998: 178). Arendt links action to the creation of art: 'The particular content of words and deeds, as well as their general meaning, can manifest in various forms in a creation of art' (Arendt, 1998: 178).

In his essay 'Beyond good and evil', DR Villa (1992: 287) quotes Arendt as follows: 'The common element connecting art and politics is that they are both phenomena of the public world'. He also discusses Arendt's analogies between action and the performance of art, explaining that Arendt compares works of art to the 'products' of action, namely words and deeds. What they share, Arendt claims, is 'the quality that they are in need of some public space where they can appear and be seen; they can fulfill their own being, which is appearance, only in a world which is common to all' (Arendt, 1977: 218, quoted in Villa, 1992: 292). To be free and to act are the same (Villa, 1992: 277). The (limited) freedom to act occurs in

the world, that is, within a web of human relationships created by the fact of plurality. In this sense, to act – to perform in public – is political. The person who acts begins something, initiates or sets something in motion, and cannot know ahead of time how it will end. In some cases, as Arendt points out, and as was the case with the group of artists in Musrara, the resulting consequences are irreversible. In response to this unpredictability, Arendt raises the possibility of forgiveness:

The possible redemption from the predicament of irreversibility ... is the faculty of forgiving. The remedy for unpredictability, for the chaotic uncertainty of the future, is contained in the faculty to make and keep promises ... Without being forgiven, released from the consequences of what we have done, our capacity to act would, as it were, be confined, to one single deed from which we could never recover; we would remain the victims of its consequences forever. (Arendt, 1998: 236)

Action, by definition, occurs in public. Arendt can be considered a phenomenologist of the public sphere because of her efforts to understand the meaning(s) of political actions manifested through words and deeds (Moran, 2000). For Arendt, the term 'public' means anything that is performed in public, that is, any action that can be seen and heard by anyone and that is given wide publicity (Arendt, 1998: 50). In the context of this study, the art of Muslala was intended as action in the public sphere. The term 'public' marks the world itself. Living together in the world means that a world of objects exists between those who share it, like the classic metaphor of the table situated between those who sit around it to emphasise the fact that the world, and all that exists, simultaneously links and separates people. The public is a realm, like a theatre stage, on which the play of *vita activa* is performed (Azulai and Ophir, 2013).

In analysing *vita activa* and public life, Arendt considers the meaning of the social and the political. She is critical of Thomas Aquinas's claim that 'man is by nature political, that is, social' (Arendt, 1998: 22). Indeed, according to Arendt, the 'political' and the 'social' should be understood as oppositional actions (Pitkin, 1998: 177) that express inverse attitudes towards an issue that is basic to human life: plurality. She defines the political as the insistence of opening up plurality to unpredicted results – the primary principle of human freedom. In contrast, the social is the normalisation, institutionalisation and regulation of plurality. In other words, the social necessitates conformism by means of diverse institutions, from family to state, as society wishes to regulate pluralism and neutralise the anarchic potential of plurality. Arendt's discussion of the social addresses two seemingly different themes: one pertaining to socially conformist behaviour and the other to the formation of 'the economy' in which production and consumption, once carried out in private households, become collective activities (Canovan, 1999: 619). In this article, I consider only the first theme because of the centrality it provides to the issue of plurality. Pitkin offers a helpful discussion of Arendt's understanding of the social vis-a-vis the notions of work, labour and action, which views the social in relation to action (Pitkin, 1998: 180), as action is activity that is linked to relations between people. Pitkin thus brings us to the core of this discussion: the different ways – political and social – in which people act and collectively assign meaning (in the public realm) when they face plurality.

Political, by contrast, refers to the liberty to be together among many, with others, against or for them, in ways that are not predetermined and are constantly being reshaped. In this state of togetherness, the political is to create – through speech and deeds, conducted publicly and in the public

realm – new possibilities of existence (Azulai and Ophir, 2013). The emphasis on direct political action as politics proper reverses the entire history of political philosophy, shifting the focus from abstract ideas, normative constructions and societal considerations to the specificity of political actions (Mavrommatis, 2015). Arendt's understanding of the social helps her understand why people do not exercise their liberty to act politically, why people obey rather than exercise their liberty to act among people, even though they are free to do so (Pitkin, 1998: 184).

These three concepts – action, the public realm and the distinction between the social and the political – are critical in the analysis of Muslala's activities in Musrara. The group based its activities on principles of artistic expression that emphasised the political (the desire to incite a discussion of plurality), action (the desire to intervene and to create an event of reference) and the public (the desire to act among people, in a space where people come together). They engaged in a form of art that responds directly to a particular public context, known alternatively as public art, intervention art and site-specific art.

Inspired by Arendt's understanding of the distinction between the social and the political, I maintain that Muslala's attempt to create a meeting point with the Palestinians was inconsistent with their desire to be perceived as a community-building, and thus social, initiative. Whereas political refers to the freedom to deal with pluralism in a manner that opens it up to unpredictable results, social refers to the manner in which plurality is regulated, managed, institutionalised and normalised (Arendt, 1998). In this sense, these two notions run up against one another. Muslala's goal was to engage in artistic activity in order to create a meeting point with the other – the Palestinians across the road. However, pursuing art as an

intervention activity in public space also required them to address critical questions regarding their legitimacy. What right did they have to take such action, to intervene in the intimate space of a neighbourhood? What would make them legitimate participants in this social circle? They believed that working with and for the 'authentic community', that is, its Mizrahi Jewish residents, would lend legitimacy to their intervention, as would living among them. The spatial history of the neighbourhood – with its stone Arab houses, its previous international border and the experience of life along the seam line – became an arena for the activity of a group that placed the point of a meeting with the other at the core of their artistic work. Connection and cooperation with neighbourhood residents, Jewish immigrants from Arab countries who had become members of the lower class (Semyonov and Levin, 1987; Shohat, 1988), were of great significance to members of this group.

Musrara: A socio-urban survey

In the course of 2013, I conducted a full ethnographic investigation of Musrara that constitutes the core of my research. Urban ethnography on the neighbourhood scale is a major and well-known methodology in urban anthropology. The neighbourhood scale, combined with in-depth research, provides researchers with a holistic multi-layered understanding to be used in the formation of a meaningful interpretational framework. In the case of Musrara, the research included multiple visits to the neighbourhood that consisted of formal and informal tours, formal interviews and incidental street conversations, photography and documentation of interactions in the neighbourhood. In addition, all interviews and interactions were transcribed. My research focused primarily on two main groups: Muslala, the group of artists that

was operating in the neighbourhood; and the Musrara community administration, which represented the neighbourhood's Mizrahi Jewish population. Although both groups showed an interest in the research and a desire to read relevant articles, maps and plans, interest was especially great among the artists.

My work also included a socio-historical investigation of the neighbourhood, which helped generate broad contextual frameworks for understanding the neighbourhood's physical structure and development. As a seam line neighbourhood in Jerusalem, understanding the history and the social make-up of Musara is particularly relevant.

Musrara was established in 1889 by wealthy Palestinian Arabs of Jerusalem (Eliaz et al., 2011). During the 1948 War, its Palestinian residents were forced to flee, and the neighbourhood was divided between Israeli and Jordan control. The section of the neighbourhood that remained under Israeli rule encompassed 163 acres (0.66 square kilometres) and contained 80 abandoned houses. After the war, approximately 60 families – mostly Mizrahi Jewish immigrants from Middle Eastern and North African countries – moved into the empty Arab / Palestinian houses in Israeli Musrara.

The residents of Musrara became increasingly bitter after the war, as they witnessed an improvement in the quality of life throughout Israeli society but continued to live in dire conditions. In January 1971, a small group of young Musrara residents founded a social movement known as the Black Panthers, inspired by the American Black Panther Party (Cromer, 1978). The Black Panthers have been revered as champions of equal rights for improved conditions of work, education and basic necessities such as food and housing. As a result of this positive legacy, linking themselves to the Black Panthers offered a potential source of legitimation for the artists of Muslala.

The Muslala project got underway in 2009, and group members actually moved into the neighbourhood with hopes of achieving a legitimate sense of local belonging. Hopeful that art could serve as a transformative force, they planned to implement art exhibitions, guided tours, a community garden and art workshops. In this way, they sought to produce a new model that combined artistic activity with social orientation. Most of the activities were to take place outdoors in the public realm, thus potentially affecting the neighbourhood and the surrounding area in East and West Jerusalem and beyond. Muslala group members believed that ‘art is the only multi-cultural and international language and thus must be accessible, communicative, and a key tool in creating a dialogue between people, groups, communities, and nations’ (from the group’s website).

An ethnography of art in a seam line neighbourhood

The leaders of Muslala articulated their definition of artistic action during the first meeting conducted for this study. As one group leader stated: ‘My view of art is that it enhances equality and the acceptance of the “other”’. Another member spoke of one of his own contributions: ‘I offered suggestions [for artistic initiatives in the neighbourhood] – works such as a periscope over the wall, so one can see the other side’. These understandings of art indicate that the understandings of public art within Muslala included the aim of creating an encounter with the ‘other’: the Palestinians residing in the eastern portion of the neighbourhood. The desire to orchestrate an encounter with the other was an attempt to subvert the status of the seam line, the previous international border that still marks differences of religion, status and ethno-national identity between the Palestinian residents of East Jerusalem and the Jewish-Israeli residents of the city.

Muslala redefined not only artistic action but also neighbourhood space. When they referred to Musrara, they meant *both* parts of the neighbourhood: east and west. Group members were certainly aware that this agenda would be rejected by neighbourhood residents, as it constituted a direct threat to their property and their symbolic ownership rights. Despite their recognition that their strategy might offend residents with a long history in the neighbourhood, they proceeded with their plan to facilitate an encounter. ‘Even if our perception somehow offends the long-time [residents]’, explained one of the artists said, ‘we need to talk about history prior to 1948. They experienced trauma, and I’m not sure that this is the way to handle it’.

The group faced several challenges during their activity in the neighbourhood. The most prominent one was the fact that public art projects typically go hand-in-hand with gentrification. Indeed, studies depict art as an action that generates a process of gentrification with results that are sometimes harsh on the local population (Ley, 2003). The artists were aware of and concerned about the potential consequences of their actions. ‘Do we have the right to exist in the neighbourhood?’, asked one artist: ‘Are we exacerbating gentrification?’.

What brought this group of artists to a neighbourhood identified with Jewish emigrants from Arab countries (Mizrachi Jews)? Each party recognised in the other symbolic capital that could benefit them: the artist group saw the potential value of Musrara’s social protest led by the Black Panthers in the 1970s. Particularly at the onset of their protest, the Black Panthers were perceived as an authentic group – a second generation living in poverty, lacking education and formal political identification but possessing a ‘social’ agenda of justice and equality. Due to Musrara’s history, and its connection to a legacy of social action in the country, Muslala members believed the neighbourhood bore great potential and

promise. As one explained, 'Musrara is their [the artists] studio and the mine from which they quarry their success and careers'.

In the meantime, local residents were aware that Musrara was an attractive location for a community art project, as reflected in the following words of the community administration's chairperson:

What does 'musrara' mean in Moroccan? Beautiful, gentle. We are an enclave located in the gravitational centre of the world. The eyes of the world are upon us. Everybody wants this beautiful pearl. [The group] knew that without Musrara, they had no possibility. Here is where they discovered the 'charge' here. Why didn't they go to another neighbourhood? Because of us, our humanity, the social mixture. The place has potential you can extract.

Still, the community administration, which consisted of long-time neighbourhood residents, firmly believed that Muslala would not get involved in politics. As one member later explained: 'We thought they would do art – not *politics*... that there would be cultural and artistic activities – but no *politics*'. Here I emphasise that when Musrara residents say politics, they mean explicit support of a political party that expresses positions in terms of Israel's right wing and left wing. In Israeli public discourse, this is understood primarily as attitudes towards Palestinians and a territorial solution regarding the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The community administration supported Muslala's first initiative, but were surprised to see what that event was about:

And what did I see on TV? The man [the leader of the Muslala group] said that Musrara was a Palestinian neighbourhood. I'm a member of the Likud¹ Party and have never mixed politics with neighbourhood issues. Muslala said: we were wrong, it won't happen again. He said he was doing art. Right, art.

Although relations between the artists and the community administration were initially

based on good faith, these feelings quickly eroded as the Mizrahi residents of Musrara experienced Muslala as radical and disingenuous. Another member of the community administration, who attended the conservative Bar-Ilan University, described the artists as saying they wanted to help the neighbourhood youth, but then in reality bringing 'left wing political activities' into the neighbourhood. One of these activities, which had a clear political resonance for the residents, was guided tours, known as heritage tourism (Boyd, 2000). According to this administration member:

They used to come down here with groups of people (including Palestinians), pointing at people's houses, saying – here are your homes. Didn't he think about what that meant? We are in favour of doing – good things, culture. But we are against the left, and he is on the extreme left. In the days of the Black Panthers everything was different. There was nothing to eat – we went out to protest. So we did something political.

The language offered by Arendt in *The Human Condition* helps us deepen our understanding in this context, drawing our attention to a gap between the action and the interpretation of the action, which forces us to speak about trust, forgiveness and violence. With the emergence of this gap – between the meaning that the artists assigned to their artistic activity and the local administration's interpretation of art activity in the neighbourhood – the trust between the parties broke down and all activity conducted by Muslala became a source of conflict. My approach of distinguishing between the different definitions of 'society' and 'politics' helps us understand why cooperating with the local community while simultaneously acting in the explosive setting of a seam line area is necessarily in opposition and could never be two sides of the same coin. The decision to bring Palestinians and Jewish

tourists to the neighbourhood and to present the Palestinian history of the neighbourhood is an example of political action – an instance of the freedom that the artists exercised to open up the story of the neighbourhood for discussion. The local leadership saw this as a dangerous political act and did whatever they could to resist it. I consider this argument further by focusing on the group's major art project, the 'watermelon stand', which was intended to serve as a 'meeting point' for residents of the east and west parts of the neighbourhood.

The watermelon stand on the seam line between East and West Jerusalem

The Muslala members presented the idea of establishing a watermelon stand as an artistic activity on the historical border – the seam line – between East and West Jerusalem, as follows:

When the walls between Jordan and Israel came down in the summer of '67, the nature of no-man's land changed dramatically. The area that divided both sides of the city turned into a meeting space between East and West. Every evening when night fell, lights lit up the recreation facility that extended from Damascus Gate to Mandelbaum Gate. The Hebrew and Arabic festivities that at times lasted until day-break included watermelon with salted cheese, a bakery that was open until the morning, hot Sachleb and TV screened action movies. This nocturnal experience was shared by everyone – rich and poor, tourists and locals, Orthodox and non-religious, Jews and Arabs. And all focused on one thing – a cold, sweet slice of watermelon.

This evocative quote reflects the motives of Muslala as well as their methods: spatial action inspired by a particular historical moment in time when Jews and Arabs engaged in economic and cultural dialogue.

Muslala thus felt they had conceptualised a project that honoured both local history and the environment and, indeed, the future of the neighbourhood. As the initiative's lead designer explained:

It was an amazing process because we had a theme. We corresponded with the history of the place – it was the place where the watermelon stands were originally set up after '67 – in an attempt to reconstruct that historical moment.

Sharp et al. (2005: 1016) emphasise both the importance of working hand-in-hand with the local community and the importance of the process. In our case, the artists were well aware of these ideas and directed their artistic motivations to signify moments in the residents' own history.

On this basis, the artists set up a recreation area on the seam line, including a place to buy watermelon, and visit art exhibitions and musical cultural events. The project was intended as a festival of sorts, and was meant to take place once or twice a year. But tensions among the residents became palpable during the first event, which was attended by many Palestinian youth and where a dance party commenced. In the words of the chairperson of the community administration:

[The group of artists] brought the young punks from Damascus Gate. They [Palestinian youth from East Jerusalem] lifted female students on their shoulders and started fondling them ... Muslala took this territory – which is not theirs – and turned it into a border seam line.

The fact that the watermelon stand intended to connect to a time and place of dialogue between Jews and Arabs in Jerusalem did not convey the meaning that the artists had intended. Indeed, it backfired, as members of the community administration now saw the Muslala artists as out of touch with the current situation. As one member said:

When you do things based on your own free will, it is much better and more natural. Things have changed. Back then, the political awareness of the Palestinians in the stands was low. They wanted to make a living. There was no violence. Today, there is political awareness. And everything they do is against us.

Ultimately, the community administration experienced Muslala's actions as politically motivated. As one member said, 'In the youth centre, there were meetings between Jews and Arabs. I don't have a problem with that as long as it stems from a true social motive – not a political one'. Another member described his sense that the artists were taking sides with the Palestinians:

Who came to aid [the Palestinians]? People like the members of this group of artists. We couldn't tolerate it. [They've] started to develop and know more, and our dear brothers [speaking sarcastically] are assisting them. They brought tourists and told them that our houses are Palestinian houses.

The community administration consistently expressed a strong sense of betrayal when they spoke about Muslala's activities in general and the watermelon stand project in particular. To use Arendt's theoretical language, we can say that they kept asking what would be the consequences of the project.

The neighbourhood residents expressed their fury with the project by not attending it in 2014, its second year. Although the event appeared successful from the outside, the absence of the local residents signified a serious failure for Muslala. It meant that their 'political' action, with the cooperation of the local community, had failed. The resulting lack of trust between the sides resulted in a dispute over who held the keys to the gate of the facility and who was the real owner of the seam line public realm.

In reflecting on what they themselves perceived as a failure, the leaders of the project

expressed disappointment that the local residents were not open to these encounters. Some also recognised, however, a possible naivety in their own expectations of the watermelon stand. One artist shared his hope that the watermelon stand would be a neutral space, while acknowledging that this was not something that the locals could support:

What was my mistake regarding the meeting point? One does not offer a nude class to a traditional population. An element of sensitivity should be taken into account. The very point of a Jewish-Arab encounter is a sensitive issue ... One of the main difficulties is that there is no possibility here for solving problems, for a dialogue. There is no neutral space. The meeting point can't serve as [a place for] internal dialogue.

The project's lead designer also spoke at length about his vision and the limits of what was possible in the mixed community of Musrara. He clearly envisioned the project as political, explaining: 'there is something *political* in crossing the road'. However, he also claimed that he had failed to realise 'the complexity of the place' until he became involved in this project. What he envisioned as a festival of people coming together – a 10-day cultural event with something for everyone: live music, storytelling, movies, watermelon for five shekels – turned into a site of anger and misunderstanding. His girlfriend had been thrown in the air by enthusiastic Palestinian youths: 'She didn't care – dance is her field of interest', he explained, reflecting a sense that the local residents could have been more open and flexible. Indeed, what the locals focused on, he explained, was a sign written in Arabic. He himself had insisted that signs be written in both Hebrew and Arabic to express their desire to bring the two populations together, but this symbolic gesture had the effect of further alienating the local residents.

The project's lead artist also articulated his vision of creating an encounter, reflecting a philosophical difference between the intentions of the artists and the expectations of the community:

We are missing something when we don't meet the other. Regardless of the terrorist attacks and the dangers, I want to meet the other. I am interested in this multiculturalism, in these meeting points. And I want to meet ... There is a question here of which philosophy of life you want to live with. The other side also lives in fear. This fear only disempowers.

Ultimately, the vision of facilitating a new encounter between the people living on the opposite sides of the road was rejected by the Musrara community.

Conclusion: From freedom to conflict

This article's point of departure is the nexus of two fields of knowledge – urban public art and divided cities – which I sought to locate within the paradigm of the Global South. Or, in other words, if we began with Connell's (2013: 211) suggestion of understanding 'postcolonial periphery as a site of knowledge production', we conclude by asking how considering the case of a seam line neighbourhood in Jerusalem enhances our understanding of the phenomenon, and, more importantly, enriches our theoretical toolbox. The struggle between the residents and the group of artists produced a unique language that distinguishes between social activity and political activity and the way in which the residents dealt with both. The theory of Arendt made a meaningful contribution to our toolbox for understanding the social and the political in conditions of multiplicity as distinct forms of action between which tension exists. In this conclusion, I seek to highlight two main components: The

first is a discussion of the conditions in which people operate, (a divided city in the Global South). The second component is the perspective from which its narrative is told. This perspective, which is unique to the residents of the seam line area both on an urban spatial level and on the level of cultural identity, creates new frameworks of meaning that are absent from the academic discourse with which we are familiar.

Intensive multiplicity: What forms of action does it facilitate and preclude?

The decision to examine public art obligates us to include context in the analysis (Sharp et al., 2005: 1002). Indeed, my research required me to dive deep into both the past and present of the Jerusalem seam line neighbourhood in order to identify and understand the conditions under which its residents acted. The study revealed two different periods – each characterised by distinctively different conditions – that were ingrained in the consciousness of the residents: 1967–1987, from the Six-Day War and the unification/occupation of Jerusalem until the first Palestinian Intifada; and 1987–2016, from the First Intifada to the present. During the first period, the Mizrahi Jewish residents of Musrara lived in dire conditions and abject poverty, which led them to establish the Black Panthers movement in Israel. In these conditions, their encounter with the Palestinian residents of Jerusalem created structures of opportunity in commerce (as manifested in the watermelon stands), in the ability to shop in the markets of East Jerusalem and in the realm of crime (primarily the drug trade). That is to say, as a seam line neighbourhood, Musrara has constituted an area of encounters of various kinds. The First Intifada, which was accompanied by a dramatic increase in the resistance against Jewish occupation of and control over East Jerusalem, marked a turning point

in the attitude of neighbourhood residents towards East Jerusalem and its Palestinian inhabitants. Musrara residents explained that it was then that the fear began, leading to processes of separation and re-division. That is to say, whereas the dynamic of *meeting* was a major element of Musrara as a seam line neighbourhood until 1987, from 1987 onwards the organising element was *separation*. Concurrent with the Intifada, neighbourhood residents were given the option to acquire the homes in which they lived, the first wave of gentrification began along with a rise in property values and residents experienced rapid social mobility as a result of their entry into the primary job market and the consolidation of political power in the institutions of the ruling Likud Party. In this way, the separation from East Jerusalem and its Palestinian inhabitants must be understood as having political, economic and social dimensions stemming from the change in conditions.

One reason for the group's failure was its decision to revive practices rooted in the first period, when the neighbourhood was indeed a meeting point, and to make use of them during the second period, after the primary logic at play had become one of separation. The watermelon stand could operate under 'the previous conditions', neighbourhood residents explained, but not today: 'Today, hatred already exists'. Using Arendt's terminology, we can say that today, such action cannot be taken among the many, as every such action is a threat to the separate life that the neighbourhood residents have created.

Studies addressing the cultural impact of public art in cities have found that public art often serves as a means of recognising the history of a specific community (Sharp et al., 2005). This finding holds relevance for the discussion at hand: Muslala sought to express the unique history of the community but was nonetheless rejected by its members, as conditions have changed over time and

practices of meeting along the seam line that were acceptable during the first period have, during the second period, become dangerous political acts. The members of the community themselves have ceased initiating such encounters, and the spatial situation that had facilitated them has changed and given way to a space of separation. This provides us with an important reminder for social research in cities. 'Communities', we must remember, are not objects frozen in time. They are, rather, living entities whose frequent changes continuously reshape the social narrative. In this way, artistic action that Orientalises or idealises a certain community and seeks to perform ceremonies or customs under new conditions is destined to end in conflict. Members of Musrara's community administration stripped the artists of their freedom to act within the local multiplicity due to their unwillingness to accept the unanticipated effects of their action among the many.

Arab-Jews: A new perspective yielding a new framework of meaning

A second contribution of this article is the account it provides from the vantage point of a marginal group: Jews who immigrated to Israel from countries in the Middle East and North Africa in the 1950s. This group, which is Jewish in religion and Arab in culture, shatters the Jewish-Arab dichotomy to which we have grown so accustomed. By taking up residence in abandoned Arab homes along the seam line in Jerusalem, they were physically and socially located along the seam line between Jews and Arabs – and at the heart of the conflict. Despite their large number and their unique position in Israeli divided cities, Mizrahi Jews suffered from ongoing discrimination in all Israeli social institutions, including academic research. Only in the 1990s can we point to an increased flow of studies seeking to

understand and analyse the ways in which this population assigns meaning, and how this meaning establishes a new urban and national reality. This study sheds light on the meaning they assign to art as an act of aestheticisation and enrichment. Arendt's distinction between the social and the political illuminates the Mizrahi perspective: in their eyes, art must be a social act; that is to say, an act that operates within the neighbourhood institutions with the aim of normalising its multiplicity.

The Mizrahi Jewish residents of Musrara, some of whom still remember entering the abandoned Arab homes as children and their parents' struggle for survival, are under no circumstances willing to allow political action – action that opens up the physical and social multiplicity in which they live to action with potential effects that cannot be anticipated. On the contrary, their only aim is to fortify and nurture their status as owners of their homes. They oppose political action not because they do not remember or know that their homes are absentee property; they do so because they remember this fact all too well, and seek control over the narrative of their life in their neighbourhood. As refugees from Arab countries, they were victims of ongoing discrimination in Israel, they experienced poverty and they founded the Black Panthers. Finally, they underwent social and political mobility until their status was solidified in the centres of political power in Israeli society. During a conversation in the course of the Muslala's activity in the neighbourhood, one member of the community administration said as follows: 'They [the artists] are coming in and trying to redefine things. We won't let them'. The most effective weapon in fighting the artists was the decision to isolate them and to prevent the language they sought to create from establishing a foothold in the neighbourhood.

Using the terminology of Arendt's theory, the fundamental offense ultimately

committed against the artists was the act of avoiding them. This stripped them of their ability to act, as one cannot act in isolation. Initial local reactions were indicative of cooperation, but anger stemming from the possible results of their actions led to exclusion, as longtime residents simply refused to attend their events. Even though the actions taken were considered successful by Jerusalem's external artistic milieu, the artists themselves experienced failure. The next step was the personal expulsion of the group's leader from major events, followed by the community administration's fight to expel the artists as a group from the neighbourhood by not permitting them to use the shelter that served as their base of activity or to operate within the neighbourhood. By doing so, they eradicated the artists' potential power to act among the many (Arendt, 1998), and conflict ensued.

When the conception of art as critical political action (that is cultivated in academics) and the conception of art as a means of urban regeneration (which is cultivated in academics and adopted by large offices engaged in strategic planning and large cities) is adopted in the Global South, they are destined to meet locals acting in physical, historical and social conditions of multiplicity, intensiveness, refugee situations and conflict. Adopting Arendt's perspective of unique groups and the theoretical language she proposes provides us with a new possibility for understanding the logic of many Jerusalem residents, and an even larger number of members of Israeli society, that will forever succeed in disrupting any urban directive 'from above' that threatens their location and status within the city and within the country.

Although this article ascribes special importance to the local, specific arena both as a workshop for new theory and a concrete arena for fieldwork, this concluding discussion is meant to pave the way for analysis

that transcends the borders of Jerusalem. The ideas of intensive multiplicity and mixed/hybrid/third collective identities that take form along urban seam lines in divided cities can contribute to our understanding of major cities in Europe that have been transformed by mass immigration, which includes not only Southern populations but also Southern contexts and conditions.

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1. A centre-right wing party that has been in power for over a decade.

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