

The Potential Politics of Urban Artist-Run Residencies (UARRs) as Public Art in East Jerusalem

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Abstract

The artist and researcher Anat Litwin coined the term ‘urban artist-run residencies’ (UARRs) to introduce a new form of public art that benefits both artists and the local community for its specific social and collaborative qualities. Through an ethnographic account, I examine the possibility of developing UARRs in East Jerusalem, an urban area characterized by nationalist, ethnic and religious clashes. The paper points out from an anthropologist perspective how, in areas of conflict, where things become acutely political, it is crucial to engage in a critical approach to what role art and artists may assume in a given social, cultural and political context.

Keywords

Urban Art; Areas of Ethnic, National and Religious Conflict; East Jerusalem; Social-Based Art; Artists’ Residencies; Public Art

Introduction¹

Artists' residencies have emerged as a new dynamic phenomenon in the art world. Many of them include grassroots interaction as part of their agenda and have a public art component, valued for the creative synergies they can produce between resident artists and local communities. In this context, the notion of Urban Artist Run Residencies (UARRs), coined by the Israeli-American artist, curator and researcher Anat Litwin, refers specifically to residencies initiated, managed and hosted by artists in urban settings, and conceived as collaborative-social works of art.

As a social anthropologist and artist recently arrived in the city of Jerusalem² to explore its various art worlds, and mindful of the politics inherent to them, I was keen to explore Litwin's concept and its applicability as a kind of public art in this particularly difficult part of the world. In areas of conflict, everything is easily interpreted in one way or another as political, and even more so in the city of Jerusalem. As a divided city, holy to the three Abrahamic religions, Judaism, Christianity and Islam, envisioned by both Israelis and Palestinians as their national capital, given special international status by the United Nations, but under full control of the Israeli state since 1967, it ignites deep passions generally and causes daily sufferings locally: while West Jerusalem is now fully absorbed as part of Israel and predominantly Jewish, the Eastern part of the city, which was under Jordanian control since the 1949 Armistice Agreement until it was annexed by Israel in 1967, remains characteristically Palestinian yet a deeply contested space where inhabitants enjoy very different legal rights depending on whether they are Jewish or Palestinian.

In Jerusalem, as in any conflict area, a critical approach to the role that public art and artists intentionally and unintentionally play is necessary: art, however well intended it might originally be, can take on heightened political agency in conflict areas. This paper introduces the innovative notion

¹ I am grateful to the long-term collaboration and conversations with Anat Litwin. While Litwin gave me feedback over developing versions of this paper, I remain solely responsible for the final text and any misinterpretations.

² I came to Jerusalem in October 2014 with a visiting scholarship from the Hebrew University to continue my research on art and politics, first begun in the Basque Country in France and Spain.

of UARRs and recounts the explorative steps taken by Anat Litwin to introduce it and discuss it in the context of East Jerusalem. I present an anthropological perspective on the situation in an attempt to offer further understanding on the challenges ahead in the possibilities of developing UARRs in this part of the city. The paper points out some of the issues UARR initiators will have to attend to as part of the effort to remain true to its ethical and grassroots nature. It brings attention to the potential clashing interpretations of the role of art and artists in such a difficult context.

Public Art in Areas of Conflict: An Anthropological Perspective

Anthropology, as the study of “what makes us human”³, can offer a perspective on art that goes beyond normative views, to bring attention to how art actually works in human interaction. An anthropological approach to art places emphasis on it as both a product of and an agent in human dynamics. An anthropological perspective reminds us of the necessity to keep in mind the social and cultural context of an artwork, what are its intentions and unintended consequences as it makes contact with a public (Radice and Boudreault-Fournier 2017). Far from being produced in a void, art emerges thanks to a complex set of conditions and possibilities (Becker 1982; Foster 1995; Gell 1998; Van Laar and Diepeveen). Artists may also project their practice on the community in ways that are inadvertently ethically problematic. Artists create on the basis of personal experience within specific social and political situations. The motivations of artists vary, and they may have specific audiences in mind (Bray 2015). An artwork is then produced and gains meaning through the experiences of the different people who come into contact with it in specific contexts (MacClancy 1997). Art, artists and their supporters have their own individual as well as collective agencies and, as such, have potentially beneficial as well as nefarious effects on their social surroundings. Anthropologists studying art and artists in conflict areas have shed light on how artworks may be used and manipulated for specific political purposes such as propaganda, to speak to and mobilize a section of society, present a certain vision or truth, or privilege a specific narrative to the detriment of others (Bray 2014a and 2014b).

³ <http://www.americananthro.org/AdvanceYourCareer/Content.aspx?ItemNumber=2150> Accessed May 30 2018.

Literature abounds on the benefits of bringing art to areas affected by violence, discrimination and intolerance, for its potential to “assuage the suffering” of people, “facilitate conflict resolution” and “play a role in reconciliation and post-conflict society re-building” (Ramsbotham 2011, Crimmin et al 2014, Seidl-Fox 2014, Gorecki 2016). Art is celebrated here as a form of resistance to oppression, a voice for the voiceless, a way of bringing people from different belief systems together, to create trust, encourage empathy, raise awareness and tolerance of difference, and serve as a stimulant for positive debates and new reflections. Seen thus as a liberating and empowering means of human experience and expression, art is now also used by national governments, NGOs and international organizations in their development and humanitarian efforts (see also Radice 2018). Art is promoted in this context usually as short-term workshops, most often in schools or community centers, or as residencies for artists, where artists are expected to work in direct connection and exchange with their social surroundings.⁴ Residencies here are generally presented as hosting platforms for guest artists or curators to develop their practice in a collaboration with the local community on the ground. All the while acknowledging its political agency, and its capacity to be used as a political weapon or propaganda tool, art, in these cases, is lauded as a universal language that can cross over divisions of language, religion, culture and politics, offer solutions and encourage interconnectivity and autonomy.

UARRs

In the realm of artists’ residencies involving interaction with the public, Urban Artist-Run-Residencies (UARRs) are unique for being entirely grassroots and artist-driven, as well as for their inherently artistic nature. Litwin began developing her idea of UARRs as a form of social art-making as of 2006, whilst living in New York as an independent artist and curator. She explains UARRs as having “emerged on the background and in response to rapid neo liberal processes of urbanization and privatization. They tend to be alternative, small scale, independent, not-for-profit communal art

⁴ The European Commission for instance produced a handbook in 2014 on artists’ residencies for policymakers https://ec.europa.eu/culture/policy/cultural-creative-industries/mobility_en . See also <http://artseverywhere.ca/2017/11/17/artist-residency-and-the-city/> and <http://www.residencyunlimited.org/dialogues/artist-residency-and-the-city/> Accessed August 10 2018.

initiatives, which often take place in empty urban spaces in changing neighborhoods, or in the domestic settings of the artist's' home. They can be seen as a unique form of public art driven by artists who consider the act of 'hosting' a critical extension of their artistic vision and social agenda, merging contemporary art, social innovation and everyday urban living while challenging the boundaries between public and domestic spheres".⁵ In the context of the growing field of art residencies worldwide, experimentation with urban commons, and the flourishing urban art scene, Litwin notes that UARRs "stand out as vital urban pivots of creativity" (2017). They are "set out of the main-stream commercial art market and usually embedded within changing urban areas" (ibid). Litwin explains that UARR platforms are usually driven by the quest to challenge the role of the artist in setting new social and cultural paradigms while artistically performing a 'right to the city', meaning a "demand for a transformed and renewed access to urban life on behalf of the local resident" (ibid). UARRs usually lead "multidisciplinary artistic and urban participatory practices (..) such as 're-appropriation', 'urban interventions', 'DIY', 'pop-up urbanism', 'communal gatherings' and 'artistic hosting'" (ibid). Thus Litwin suggests UARRs as "an artistic genre of it's own merit within the realm of public art" and "a catalyst for social and urban change" (ibid), "critically deciphering and restructuring a complex sense of home, while suggesting new forms of communal urban living"⁶.

While in New York, Litwin created her own UARR, which she called 'The HomeBase Project' (HB). She conceived HB as a nomadic social-based and interactive artform focusing on the concept of 'home' and artistic hosting in today's age of globalism and urban change. The project was founded in 2006 in New York City as an independent non-profit initiative, and after four years in different neighborhoods of NY (Brooklyn, Soho, Harlem and Lower East Side), Litwin traveled with HB to Berlin (2010-2013), and then to West Jerusalem (2013-2015), followed by a last station in Saitama, Japan (2015-2016). In each location, she set base in an empty building where she invited selected artists to live and produce a

⁵ Text offered by Anat Litwin, May 24 2018, based on her website <http://www.homebase.org/context.html> Accessed May 14 2018 and her publication Litwin, Anat (2017) "Research Proposal for Creative Cities Fellowship at Stanford University", January 11 2017.

⁶ Additional notes offered by Anat Litwin on a May 14 2018 version of this paper.

new artwork in situ as part of a three week-long residency program. HB residency entailed a program of activities relating to the exploration of 'home', urban walks, lectures, workshops, shared dinners, and meetings with neighbors, helping to connect the resident artists with the local community. Neighborhood representatives and experts in artistic and cultural initiatives were invited to discuss pressing issues relating to home, local urbanism and social change, as well as the potentials and benefits of art residencies and artistic hosting.⁷ After the residency phase, during which the building was transformed into a new space, HB opened up to the public as an interactive cultural platform, offering exhibits in the rooms of the buildings, performances, communal gatherings, workshops and artist talks in the HB salon, all free of cost. To finance HB, Litwin succeeded in obtaining funds from various private and public patrons.⁸

With a desire to further explore the potential of the artist residency field, and specifically how urban art residency models can benefit their communities and cities, Litwin applied and received a curatorial fellowship grant from the Andy Warhol Foundation in 2013. This enabled her to pursue her research on the applicability and future potential of UARRs in different urban contexts, which she titled the "Roundtable Residency Research" (RRR). The research model included three round table meetings in three international cities - New York/Jerusalem (West and East/Tokyo (2013-2016) in which experts from different fields of knowledge would discuss local needs as a basis for forming a future 'site specific' UARR model. Litwin hosted RRR West Jerusalem at HomeBase Jerusalem 2015, inviting a variety of individuals active in the local art and cultural scene to participate. She was well aware of the very different case of East Jerusalem, and of the need therefore to organize another RRR

⁷ Concrete results of the HB projects have already included multidisciplinary exhibitions of site-specific work, workshops, publications, and presentations by artists and local residents. Many of the artists went on to engage in new related hosting initiatives, which emphasize process over product and bring forward a creative social awareness.

⁸ See <http://www.homebaseproject.org/partners.html> Accessed August 10 2018. One of these partners was Edna Fast, owner of LunArt, a private Israeli non-profit family foundation designed specifically to support Arab Israelis, with an emphasis on education and the arts; she specifically helped finance the participation of three Arab Israeli artists at HB programs in Berlin and Jerusalem. (Arab Israeli is the term used to refer to the Palestinian non Jewish population in Israel, which has Israeli citizenship but often does not benefit of the same opportunities as Jewish Israelis. They are exempt from compulsory military service. See also Pinson 2007 and Peled 2013.)

focusing specifically on that part of the city. After her initial steps of organizing RRR East Jerusalem, Litwin invited me to get involved as a participant observer and offer my anthropological analysis of the project.

Jerusalem

Before proceeding to an account of RRR East Jerusalem, it is necessary to set out at least briefly the geopolitical scene. The Western part of Jerusalem came under Israeli control during the war in 1948, which led to the establishment of the state of Israel. The majority of the Palestinian Christian and Muslim inhabitants fled to the Eastern part. The Western side of the city is today a completely consolidated part of contemporary Israel. East Jerusalem, on the other hand, continues as a deeply contested area: it refers both to the part of Jerusalem, including the old walled city, that was under the rule of the Kingdom of Jordan between 1948 and 1967, *and* the wider surrounding area, including 64 km² of Jordan's West Bank annexed by Israel⁹ and incorporated to Jerusalem's municipality following Israel's military victory over Jordan in 1967.

Under the British Mandate of 1918 to 1948, the Jerusalem area had been predominantly Arabic-speaking, and a variety of religious and ethnic communities spread across neighborhoods outside the old walled city and into adjacent villages (Kark and Oren-Nordheim 2001). The Jewish population increased significantly over the course of the early 20th century, especially with the influx from abroad, and local Christian and Muslim communities revolted against the authorities (ibid). In 1948, following what is now called by Israelis the War of Independence and what Palestinians call the Naqba – catastrophe, West Jerusalem became predominantly Jewish and Hebrew-speaking under Israeli rule,¹⁰ while East Jerusalem under Jordanian control remained predominantly Muslim and Christian and Arabic-speaking, with the population identifying as Palestinian and holding Jordanian citizenship.

⁹ In 1988, Jordan disengaged from the West Bank and the newly created Palestinian Liberation Organization became the recognized representative of the Palestinian people.

¹⁰ In 2015, according to the Jerusalem Institute for Israeli Studies, the population of West Jerusalem was 333,700, made up of 330,400 Jews and 3,300 Palestinians.

<http://en.jerusalemstitute.org.il/?cmd=publication.7&act=read&id=652#.Wvy3scgh2Rt> Accessed May 16 2018.

In 1967, with the annexation of East Jerusalem, the Israeli authorities offered its inhabitants the status of permanent residency in Israel and the option to obtain Israeli citizenship. Most of these East Jerusalemites chose not to take Israeli citizenship, preferring to keep allegiance to their Palestinian identity (Klein 2001: 20).¹¹ Instead, they have the status of permanent residency or, what are called East Jerusalemite identification papers, given to them by the Israeli authorities. To retain these they have to regularly prove their residency, by presenting evidence of house and local tax bills to the Israeli Ministry of Interior.¹² A report by the Israeli non-profit Ir Amim, specializing on the geopolitics of Jerusalem, found that between 1967 and 2014, the Israeli authorities had revoked the status of permanent residency of 14,416 Palestinians of East Jerusalem.¹³

Today, East Jerusalem is a deeply fragmented urban area, divided from the rest of the city by Israeli discriminatory legal and planning dysfunctions, and with some parts separated from the rest of the West Bank by a 'security barrier' in continuous construction since 2002. In 2013, just over half of East Jerusalem on the western side of this barrier (which in much of this area is a concrete wall reaching up to 26 feet in height) was inhabited by Palestinians; the rest having been either expropriated or left "unplanned" by the Israeli authorities (Shlomo 2017).¹⁴ In 2015, the Palestinian population of East Jerusalem was 320,300.¹⁵ Israeli-sanctioned Jewish settlements in East Jerusalem are growing every year and in 2015, the number of Jewish people living in East Jerusalem reached 211,600 (ibid). These mostly live in highly securitized communities and benefit from comparatively privileged services from the municipality, while the rest of the neighborhood, even though under the jurisdiction of the same municipality, suffer severe shortages.¹⁶ Another important fact that is rarely mentioned is the high amount of expats employed in foreign consulates and international aid organizations working with

¹¹ This however is currently changing. For more info, see for example: <https://972mag.com/quietly-east-jerusalem-palestinians-are-becoming-israeli-citizens/46298/>; http://www.btselem.org/jerusalem/legal_status

¹² <https://www.btselem.org/jerusalem> ; <https://www.acri.org.il/en/wp-content/uploads/2017/05/Facts-and-Figures-2017-1.pdf> Accessed August 10 2018.

¹³ <http://www.ir-amim.org.il/en/node/2049> Accessed September 20 2018.

¹⁴ See also <http://bimkom.org/eng/planning-survey-and-planning-assistance/> ; <http://www.ir-amim.org.il/en/issue/urban-planning> Accessed September 20 2018.

¹⁵ <http://en.jerusalemstitute.org.il/?cmd=publication.7&act=read&id=652#.Wvy3scgh2Rt> Accessed May 16 2018.

¹⁶ <http://www.acri.org.il/en/wp-content/uploads/2015/05/EJ-Facts-and-Figures-2015.pdf> Accessed May 30 2018.

the Palestinian East Jerusalemite population, the Palestinian refugee camps or the Palestinian National Authority (PNA), including agencies of the United Nations and the European Union, who live in the most comfortable parts of East Jerusalem close to central West Jerusalem.¹⁷ Paradoxically, while the reason for their location is due to the diplomatic policies of International Law, this comparatively high-earning population also exerts an economic strain on the most disfavored Palestinian inhabitants akin to processes of gentrification elsewhere. Numerous Churches are also located in East Jerusalem, however their congregations predominantly only count expats, the majority of “Living Stones” – the term used to describe Palestinian Christians – having abandoned their homes over the course of the years, most often in search of better lives outside both Israel and the Palestinian Territories (McGahern 2012). Thus East Jerusalem, as a generally divided area under great strain, is the locus of great tension and frequent violent conflict.

RRR East Jerusalem

Litwin, aware of the sensitivity of connecting with East Jerusalem – the fact that she is Israeli, Jewish,¹⁸ and with an albeit brief history of working with the municipality of Jerusalem¹⁹ - sought a neutral partner with whom to collaborate locally. This partner was the Willy Brandt Center (WBC), a German non-governmental organization who has been since its inception committed to non-partisan dialogue and peace-building in Israel-Palestine. The location of the WBC’s headquarters on the Green Line²⁰ in East Jerusalem’s neighborhood of Abu Tor was important for the integrity of the project. It also enabled Palestinian East Jerusalemites to feel a comparatively symbolically safe and familiar place to meet.²¹ The WBC’s “social art” project coordinator Juliane Druckler assisted Anat Litwin in co-

¹⁷ <https://settlementwatcheastjerusalem.wordpress.com/> Accessed September 20 2018.

¹⁸ See also Litwin (2017: 11).

¹⁹ Litwin worked for three years as the director of the Beita art center - a “home” for social based art in Jerusalem, which she helped create under the department of art of the municipality of Jerusalem. Beita means ‘home’ in Aramaic, resonating the same meaning in Arabic and Hebrew.

²⁰ The Green Line is the demarcation line drawn in the 1949 Armistice Agreements between the armies of Israel and its neighbors Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon and Syria following the so-called 1948 Arab-Israeli War, which in Jerusalem separated the city into East and West. This line served as the de-facto border of the State of Israel until it annexed East Jerusalem and some of the West Bank following the 1967 Six-Day War.

²¹ <http://willybrandtcenter.org/> Accessed May 30 2018.

producing and funding the roundtable on UARRs in East Jerusalem and finding potential interlocutors.²²

As a first step, what Litwin wanted to do in preparation of RRR East Jerusalem was simply begin a conversation with some key Palestinians active in the East Jerusalemite art scene. Through a variety of recommendations, she reached out to a few and carried out interviews. One of these individuals was East Jerusalemite Riman Barakat, who runs a tour company Experience Palestine and serves as the coordinator of the department “creative class of East Jerusalem” for the Jerusalem Season of Culture, a project supported by the Jewish Israeli American philanthropic foundation of the Schusterman family, to boost the landscape of contemporary arts and culture in Jerusalem as a whole.²³ With the help of WBC’s funding, Litwin invited Barakat to serve as the roundtable co-host and to organize a field trip to East Jerusalem to introduce Litwin to some of the local art scene.

The East Jerusalem tour and roundtable

Litwin invited me to join the tour and the roundtable, which forms the basis of my ethnography in this paper. The tour helped map the local cultural scene prior to the roundtable event.²⁴ It made clear that, despite the conflictive atmosphere of East Jerusalem, this part of the city has a relatively established and dynamic art scene, albeit working on an ad hoc basis and very much dependent on foreign funding. We began with a meeting with Aline Khoury, representing the gallery Al Ma’Mal, a key place in East Jerusalem and in the Palestinian art world for both Palestinian and international contemporary art. Located in the Christian quarter of Jerusalem’s old walled city, only a few yards from the boundary with West Jerusalem, it is also the venue for regular cultural events that attract both Palestinians and the international expat community.

We then proceeded down the road to the Dar Al Tifel Palestinian Heritage Museum in the

²² Druckler commissioned me to write a short paper on my anthropological analysis of the encounter, which served as the basis for this present, more elaborate paper.

²³ <https://www.schusterman.org/local-initiatives/focus-areas/arts-and-culture> Accessed June 1 2018.

²⁴ The tour took place on December 28 2016.

neighborhood of the American Colony, which is also the area where many international organizations and the residencies of its employees are located. The director of the museum Khaled Khitab welcomed us and showed us around the premises, which also comprises a school and an orphanage. A few blocks away, the cultural center Nashashibi also part of the Dar Al Tifel complex, houses an important collection of ancient Palestinian and Arabic artefacts and hosts Palestinian and international art exhibitions. Both Al Ma'mal and Dar Al Tifel have also hosted artist residencies in the past. We talked about the other windows of contemporary art in East Jerusalem, Al Hoash²⁵ and the Yabous Cultural Center²⁶, both in Azzahra street also closeby. Al Ma'mal Gallery, Yabous and Al Hoash joined forces recently as the Shafuq network to organize joint Palestinian and international art initiatives. One significant event is the Qalandiya Arts Festival,²⁷ which, since 2012, takes place every two years in October, in major Palestinian hubs including East Jerusalem, also with the involvement of Al Ma'Mal and Al Hoash.²⁸

Two other “coordinators of larger cultural events in East Jerusalem”²⁹, which Barakat mentioned on the tour, are the Educational Bookshop and the Jerusalem Hotel, also close by. They were behind the launching of the first Nablus Road Open Days during June 2016, which gathered numerous grassroots Palestinian cultural associations in the streets on and adjacent to Nablus road, an important commercial thoroughfare for Palestinians close to the old walled city and the boundary with West Jerusalem.³⁰ The Educational Bookshop is a cultural reference in this neighborhood, including with

²⁵ <http://www.alhoashgallery.org> Accessed September 22 2018.

²⁶ http://yabous.org/en/?page_id=1855 Accessed September 20 2018.

²⁷ See <http://www.qalandiyainternational.org/> Accessed August 10 2018.

²⁸ I independently took part in Qalandiya 2016, going to some of its events in East Jerusalem and in nearby refugee camps, including in Bethlehem. From what I could observe, the only other visitors and participants were Palestinians and internationals. The absence of Israeli Jews can be explained by the general vulnerability and sense of insecurity that this public feels in the Palestinian context, as well as simply the general parallel worlds lived by Palestinians and Israeli Jews in the region.

²⁹ Email from Rimana Barakat, December 20 2016, addressed to me, Anat Litwin and Edna Fast. Subject: “Re: dec 28th tour art in east jerusalem”

³⁰ I also got to independently attend this event over the course of two days. Numerous Palestinian families were out, wandering the streets and the stalls in the various venues in a generally joyous atmosphere. Again, the only seemingly non-Palestinians I saw during this time were foreigners – people I recognized from the expat international and NGO community, or residents of the various foreign institutions such as the French École Biblique and the American Albright School which are located nearby in East Jerusalem’s Nablus Road and Salah Ad-din street.

the expat international and NGO communities; the bookshop in Salah Ad-din street is neighbors with the French Cultural Institute, and showcases numerous books in English on Palestinian culture and history. Another major reference close by, in the neighborhood of American Colony, is the Palestinian National Theatre Al Hakawati, which serves as a central venue for Palestinian drama workshops, plays and other cultural events.³¹ All these artistic centers are located near each other in the most comfortable part of East Jerusalem, which is also closest to the old city and central West Jerusalem. The rest – and majority - of East Jerusalem – which we did not see on the tour – remains comparatively acutely disadvantaged in terms of social and urban infrastructure and poverty.

The various foreign cultural centers, including the French Institute and the British Council, are also concentrated in this small part of East Jerusalem close to the old city. These centers are locally active in funding and hosting exhibitions, and offering film festivals and other cross-cultural encounters free to the public. Yet, according to interlocutors on the tour, despite the efforts of all these actors, East Jerusalem still suffers from limited artistic vibrancy. Interlocutors pointed out the need for more art practice in East Jerusalem schools. With the continuous conflict, East Jerusalem has become very conservative over the years, and, recently “suffered quite a brain drain”³²– many young local people have left, either to go abroad or reside in the West Bank, notably in Bethlehem or Ramallah, where living costs are much cheaper. For vibrant Palestinian arts and culture, they say Ramallah especially is now the place to go.

All the Palestinian art centers are bound by the boycott of Israeli institutions. One of the tour’s interlocutors explains to us: “otherwise it would be seen by the general Palestinian public as acknowledging and accepting Israeli occupation, and enabling its normalization.”³³ The boycott however does not prevent Palestinian initiatives from working with Israelis on an *unofficial* basis. “If [joint activities are] presented as just people getting to know each other, and to promote

³¹ I went to see several shows at Al Hakawati over the course of 2016 and 2017, which I found all well attended by Palestinian youth and young adults, and the international expat community.

³² Quote from one of the interlocutors. Name withheld.

³³ Name withheld.

understanding, then that works well. What is important is that there is no media coverage, no officiality involved – officiality spoils everything”, says one interlocutor.³⁴ We are told also about the challenges in organizing international cultural events in East Jerusalem and having to coordinate with the Israeli authorities. For example, in 2009, when the Arab League nominated Jerusalem as the Capital of Arab Culture for that year, all sorts of problems ensued “because of a total lack of preparation and the League’s misunderstandings of the political situation in East Jerusalem – they had involved the Palestinian National Authority (PNA), but the PNA cannot have any impact in East Jerusalem because it is controlled by Israel. For instance one event was a play organized by local children in the Al Hakawati theatre; it got cancelled by the Israeli authorities because it had received funding from the PNA.”³⁵

The roundtable

The East Jerusalem roundtable³⁶ consisted of six participants, similarly to the other roundtables which took place in Tokyo, Jerusalem and New York: it was made up of Rimam Barakat, artist Nasrin Abu Baker, who lives in East Jerusalem, Diana Mardi, who works as coordinator of the East Jerusalem department of Bimkom, an Israeli non-profit devoted to strengthening democracy and human rights locally in the field of planning, Khitam Edelbi, an art therapist offering art classes to disadvantaged groups in East Jerusalem and the West Bank, and Rasem Masalha legal adviser and translator working in East Jerusalem. I was present as a listener, together with WBC’s Juliane Druckler and Edna Fast, the founder of LunArt, an Israeli non-profit family foundation designed specifically to support Arab

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Ibid. Basic research on the internet about the year Jerusalem was the capital of Arab culture reveals numerous incidents where the Israeli authorities prevented many of the artistic events from taking place under the pretext of security. Some then went “underground”. Eg: <https://972mag.com/art-and-culture-goes-underground-in-east-jerusalem/26284/>; <http://www.ngo-monitor.org/reports/al-quds-underground-eu-funds-go-to-arts-festival-in-jerusalem-that-bars-israelis/>. From this experience, it seems, there developed a new initiative called Al Quds (Jerusalem in Arabic) Underground, promoted by a Dutch artist. This initiative appears to have continued for three years, and then ceased. <http://www.alqudsunderground.net>. Internet websites accessed May 30 2018.

³⁶ The roundtable took place on January 12 2017 at the WBC. Salam Qasem, a Palestinian from East Jerusalem and recent graduate of the Bezalel Art and Design Academy was commissioned by Litwin to film the roundtable. An edited version can be found here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sEZ-RURdvIw&t=475s> Accessed May 30 2018.

Israelis, who also contributed financially to the realization of RRR East Jerusalem.³⁷

Litwin laid out the key questions for discussion: what are the current pressing cultural issues in East Jerusalem? What is the role of the artist in society at large? What role can a UARR play in order to benefit East Jerusalem's urban environment? What are the cultural, organizational and ethical aspects that should be considered with regards the possible development of a future UARR model in East Jerusalem? The participants were asked to reflect, map and discuss their ideas on a round board placed in the center of the table, which functioned as a shared mental map.

The participants all stressed that the number one challenge for East Jerusalem is Israeli occupation. One major way that this affects its Palestinian inhabitants is with the 'security' barrier, which separates parts of East Jerusalem, placing the most densely Palestinian populated and poor areas outside the boundaries of the municipality of Jerusalem and into the West Bank. The imposition of the barrier affects the physical unity of East Jerusalem, dividing its population and preventing social, economic – and cultural - fluidity. Going through the barrier involves checkpoints, which are slow and humiliating ordeals. Successfully getting through them depends on your legal status, if you are a Palestinian from the West Bank whether you have the necessary Israeli permit, and if you are an East Jerusalem resident cardholder whether you have the sufficient up-to-date evidence that you really live there. Palestinian inhabitants are also regularly subjected to police and military checks and harassment. The constant legal and psychological insecurities take their toll on them together with the economic precariousness.³⁸

The restriction on urban planning under the municipality to the disadvantage of Palestinians was also mentioned. Numerous Palestinian homes are regularly evicted or demolished by the Israeli authorities. Diana Mardi mentioned that as part of her research with Bimkom she had talked with female Palestinian inhabitants who pointed out the lack of public facilities provided by the

³⁷ See footnote 9. This was the foundation's first involvement in East Jerusalem.

³⁸ www.un.org/depts/.../P2%20MAHMOUD%20ELKHAFIF%20gdsapp2012d1_en.pdf. Accessed May 30 2018.

municipality, including green spaces for the children and lavatories, things that the male inhabitants, who are the only ones consulted if at all, do not bring up. Participants agreed that the conservative and traditionalist mindset has increased in East Jerusalem over these past difficult years and is particularly suppressive for women: “we are held back by the confinements of family, religion, roots..” It was also agreed that “we Palestinians need to go beyond our national narrative and explore new creative areas with more universal values, and freedom of expression”.³⁹

“As Palestinians living in East Jerusalem we are forced to constantly prove our ‘residency’ ” says one roundtable participant. As a consequence of the daily and existential challenges, the other participants agreed, East Jerusalemite Palestinians have an ambivalent identity: with their East Jerusalemite ids, they are neither Israeli nor Palestinian; they identify with being Palestinian but live within an Israeli system, isolated and disconnected from both Israel and Palestine. While this gives cause to heaviness and darkness, participants pondered on how it can also be turned into “something positive and advantageous”.⁴⁰ The participants expressed an urgent need to bring this out, and channel these mixed emotions into creativity. Hereby lies, they agree, the potential with UARRs.

Roundtable participants also reported on the thirst for art in East Jerusalem, how when an art course is offered to the community it is welcomed eagerly and participants ask for more. More art in East Jerusalem, say the participants, would help make life more bearable, give people respite and a break from the harsh everyday reality, provide therapy and enable them to see and think differently, as well as offer broader education and horizons for the children.

Participants emphasized the importance of working with already existing initiatives and centers. These however, as we noted on the tour, are clustered into the wealthiest and most central part of East Jerusalem, and roundtable participants stressed the importance of having UARRs reach out into the more isolated parts of East Jerusalem, particularly the neighborhoods of Isawiya, Silwan and

³⁹ This quote is not ad verbatim but drawn from my notes during the roundtable. One participant stated this and was backed up by the other participants.

⁴⁰ Quote from one of the interlocutors. Name withheld.

Shuafat, which are affected by poverty as well as displacement by Israeli settlements and the presence of the “security barrier”.

Participants expressed the wish for collaboration and openness. There is a need for a common language to communicate and overcome the barriers between people, they said. Art could be this universal language. Participants said they would like resident artists to interact with locals and offer them new ways of seeing life. They also wished that these artists learn from the locals, that they get involved in local life, that there be exchange and contamination on the part of the artists. And that the artist reports back to the wider global community, spread the word about what they have lived whilst in residence. Participants also suggested that Israeli Jewish artists come and experience life here for themselves, and thus through their artistic activities, get to realize how things really are in East Jerusalem. At the same time, they acknowledged that this would be difficult to set up due to security risks.

Finally, following the roundtable, the participants contributed to Litwin’s ‘policy paper’ with a summary of their ideas regarding the possibilities of UARR in East Jerusalem and key concerns.⁴¹ The tragic paradox that the idea of urban residencies run by artists with an agenda of social agency should be discussed in the context of a divided city where precisely the question of residency is such a dramatically personal, national, and existential one, where many inhabitants are insecure in their right to it, was evident, and addressed by Litwin (see 2017: 66-67).

Analysis

RRR East Jerusalem initiated an important conversation around needs, values, challenges and hopes for East Jerusalem with regards to arts and culture and their public dimension, and brought forward constructive ideas for a future art residency model in this highly charged, congested and divided setting. It is clear that UARRs in East Jerusalem could help local artists and the community develop

⁴¹ See Litwin, Anat (2017) - Roundtable Residency Research East Jerusalem Policy Paper and Project Summary Report, June 22, 2017, Unpublished document, submitted to the Andy Warhol Foundation.

creative and social potentials in the area.

A next stage of development however would first require further reflection and caution regarding what issues could be at stake in this particular context, relating to the complex relationship between art and politics in areas of conflict. As the political geographer Joanne Sharp noted with public art, the processes by which art initiatives are introduced “into the urban fabric are critical to the successful development of inclusion” (Sharp et al 2005:1001). Developing an UARR in a conflictive urban context such as East Jerusalem is much more complicated than the kind of art initiatives promoted by international and humanitarian organizations also active in this part of the city, which have clear political goals.⁴² Litwin explains UARRs as having the aim to be agents of social change within their setting. While this is not meant to be political, the claim per se of being agency-driven can still be taken as extremely political in such a difficult area as East Jerusalem. Simply the normative language employed to describe UARRs can be interpreted controversially for different groups of people for different reasons: “question(ing) existing social paradigms”, “demand(ing)” a “‘right to the city’, (_) for a transformed and renewed access to urban life on behalf of the local resident”, “‘re-appropriation’” and “a catalyst for social and urban change” (Litwin *ibid*). In a place like East Jerusalem where, as we saw and gathered on the tour and roundtable, varying power structures and entities are clashing, it becomes crucial to reflect what is precisely understood by these intentions – precisely which and whose social paradigms does one aim to question? Demand whose right to the city? What re-appropriation? In Jerusalem, these are deeply political points where not only the question of who has ownership and rights to the place are at the heart of the conflict and suffering but also, *with in* clashing groups, who controls the narratives.

⁴² For instance, the European Union’s funding program for East Jerusalem, which consisted of 10,500,00 Euros for 2016 covers education, social inclusion, community empowerment and human rights, and has as its objective “to strengthen the resilience of Palestinian East Jerusalem residents and to preserve the Palestinian character of the city”, and “to support the development of a vibrant and diverse civil society in East Jerusalem” https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/sites/near/files/c_2016_4671_aap_part_ii_annex_3_en.pdf; European Union East Jerusalem Program June 2016). Such foreign support has a clear political premise, in line with international law: “to maintain the viability of the two-state solution with Jerusalem as the future capital of two states, based on the European Council Conclusions on the Middle East Peace Process” (*ibid*). Accessed May 30 2018.

Furthermore, while the strength of UARRs are that they are devoid of organizational frameworks, that is, they are not hosted or developed by any official entity, in areas of conflict, this can also pose specific challenges: as a grassroots and independent initiative, a UARR in East Jerusalem can be vulnerable, falling prey to the control of one faction or another, and have its intentions misinterpreted or manipulated.

Thus the premises and objectives of UARRs specific to East Jerusalem need to be at base and at every step of the process self-critically thought-through. Several questions would need to be addressed in an ensuing stage of development, such as: to more deeply unpack what an UARR would wish to do in East Jerusalem by thinking about who would be the actors involved, who would be the residency hosts, and the targeted audience(s). Who would be the artists? How would their local integration be facilitated? If these are Jewish Israelis, their safety would indeed need to be ensured, which has its own consequences. What kind of art would be done and how would it relate to the local community? How to ensure that the foreign artists gain and develop a fully rounded and impartial picture of the place and participate in local life? How will the UARR work with already existing art initiatives? How will it deal with the various nationalist and community gatekeepers? How might the UARR challenge, question or reinforce certain established cultural and political boundaries? What about 'normalization', which would be an issue as soon as an Israeli facilitator or funder gets involved? The inevitable political dimension of public art and UARRs in East Jerusalem ultimately cannot be shunned.

Figures:

Figure 1. Map of Greater Jerusalem, 2018. The map shows the Green Line and the municipal boundary; the distinction between Israeli and Palestinian neighborhoods, including ongoing and future

construction projects; the route of the 'security' barrier and the way it delineates "Greater Jerusalem." The map also outlines the historic boundaries of Jordanian Jerusalem. Photo credit: Ir-Amim. Source: <http://www.ir-amim.org.il/en/maps/greater-jerusalem-2018> Accessed July 31 2018.

Figure 2. East Jerusalem, view of the East Jerusalemite neighborhood of Isawiya and the 'security barrier' separating it from the West Bank. Photo credit: Active Stills. Source: (http://bimkom.org/eng/wp-content/uploads/issawiya1.activestills.org_91.jpg) Accessed September 1 2018.

Figure 3. Al Ma'mal programming director, Aline Khoury (standing left), welcomes the tour in the gallery, with Anat Liwin (standing right). Photo credit: Zoe Bray.

Figure 4. The director of the Dar Al Tifel Palestinian Heritage Museum, Khaled Khitab (center), welcomes Rimam Barakat (to the left), Edna Fast (to the right) and Anat Litwin (far right). Photo credit: Zoe Bray.

Figure 5. The roundtable at the Willy Brandt Center, with, starting left and going clockwise, Diana Mardi, Rimam Barakat, Nasrin Abu Baker, Anat Liwtin, Zoe Bray, Rasem Masalha, and Khitam Edelbi. Photo credit: Salam Qasem.

Figure 6. The roundtable with, from left going clockwise, Diana Mardi, Suhaib Mostafa, assisting Salam Qasem, Nasrin Abu Baker and Anat Litwin. Photo credit: Zoe Bray.

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