Contesting space and belonging across cultural intimacies in South Tel Aviv Jaffa

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Background and Research Objective

Fig. 1 Street-sign in Hebrew and 'street' sprayed under it in Arabic transliterated and translated into Hebrew. Public art action.

The incorporation of different groups into the current Israeli state framework sets up conflicting relations, often framed as competing Jewish and Arab Palestinian national or nationalising projects, inequalities or secular-religious competition. The Israeli-Palestinian conflict is in stalemate. Privatisation is continuous and business activity becomes framed as part of national goals and public benefit.

These associate different senses of entitlement to house, land and space, played out in the conflict over the fate of protected tenants in the properties of the Development Authority, a public institution likewise bent on privatisation. Two impoverished neighbourhoods undergoing gentrification have a high concentration of such property whose tenants are Arab Palestinian Israeli (PAI) and Mizrahi Jewish Israeli residents. Here the struggle over housing on behalf of such residents is also the struggle over the terms of becoming public.

Hence the question: how does the contestation over housing, living space and belonging conducted with mixed national, ethnic, religious and gender groups and organisations become public, publicly accepted and sustained?

Research Approach

Claim-making performances and products in nationally and culturally mixed and changing urban space are at the intersection of multiple cultural regimes of knowledge of different power.
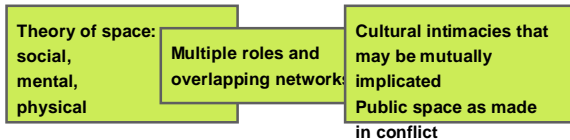
Theory of space: social, mental, physical → Multiple roles and overlapping networks → Cultural intimacies that may be mutually implicated Public space as made in conflict

Fig. 2 Framing the research question

Results

Claim-makers leveraged NGO, CBO, movement, party, list, activist, legal, planner and professional networks, bringing together civic, social, national and historical aspects of the housing problem with the goal of redefining the individualised debate over houses in terms of their legality or illegality.

Fig.3 Density as a planning concept differs from policy pressure outcomes such as the ubiquitous washing and cramped conditions.
Fig.4 Traces of bureaucratic attrition: A house as it appears in its official building file, as messy as its site.

Fig. 5 View from the south: four types of building conflict across the city in one image.
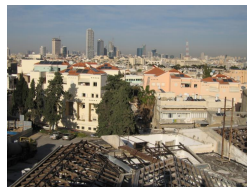

Fig. 6 House cases could be contested at each of these points and frameworks with different senses of entitlements but these also link any house to much larger issues.

Fig. 7 Group public action (2007): re-building the base of a demolished house, which left part of a family homeless.
Fig. 8 Organisation and group network action (2008-2009): same site in an advocacy paper, the basis of future negotiations for housing solutions for PAI protected tenants.

Fig. 9 Public organising (2007-2008): unified by the threat to housing the Jaffa list campaigns with the symbol of Jaffa orange, as much local as Palestinian.
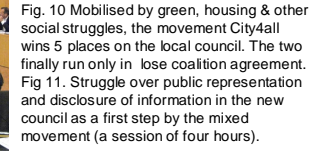Fig. 10 Mobilised by green, housing & other social struggles, the movement City4all wins 5 places on the local council. The two finally run only in lose coalition agreement.
Fig 11. Struggle over public representation and disclosure of information in the new council as a first step by the mixed movement (a session of four hours).

Significance

Working across national lines in concrete places, its conflicts&learning should not be taken for granted or dismissed even if powerful actors counter-appropriate or neutralise its challenge time and again. These clarify the underlying context of many diversities and sub-conflicts that are to be intimately known for understanding the dynamics of larger contestations.

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