Hot Spots of hostility, hospitality and the well-tempered environment. A case study of Nazareth, Israel-Palestine

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Characterized and often interrupted by conflict and violence, the urban development of cities in the Middle-East challenges our current understanding of the role of collective space in the contemporary city. Drawing from an investigation of different forms of collective space in Nazareth, Israel, this paper questions the connection between physical configurations, spatial mechanisms and socio-political constellations in the contemporary middle-eastern urban condition. In an heterogeneous urban environment the city's physical configuration drifts toward disconnected and segregated urban realms, producing as a side effect a host of undefined open spaces, no-man's lands, urban voids and cross-roads that may or may not become the grounds for new types of spatial mechanisms affecting existing socio-political constellations.

Keywords: Conflicted Cities, Public Space, Urban Voids

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Introduction

Characterized and often interrupted by conflict and violence, the urban development of cities in the Middle-East challenges our current understanding of the role of collective space in the contemporary city. Looking at different forms of collective space in Nazareth, Israel, this paper questions the connection between spatial mechanisms and socio-political constellations in the contemporary middle-eastern urban condition. As recent scholarship on Middle Eastern cities has pointed out, concepts such as traditionalism and stagnation have often obscured 'emergent urban configuratios' (Rabinowitz and Monterescu 2007, Said 1979). Therefore this study attempts to look beyond the traditional forms of Nazareth's urban spaces. In an heterogeneous urban environment the city's physical configuration drifts toward disconnected and segregated urban realms, producing as a side effect a host of undefined open spaces, no-man's lands, urban voids and junctions that may or may not become the grounds for new types of spatial mechanisms affecting existing socio-political constellations.

The spatial mechanisms of collective space in Arab cities in Israel are a result of their geopolitical context, challenged by ethnic, religious and political conflict, and the mediterranean and middle-eastern ecological and cultural environment. In spite of the problematic urban development policies of Israel's right-wing government, collective spaces in these cities have become fertile grounds for investigating new constellations of public versus private, of claiming ownership and temporary privatization but also of new opportunities of cultural exchange.

Arab cities in Israel often appear in urban studies as 'mixed cities', a category employed by Israel's Central Bureau of Statistics and a topic of academic research in sociology and political science. I argue that the term 'mixed' is deceiving and does not reflect the actual condition of most of these cities where inhabitants belonging to different ethnic and religious backgrounds live in varying degrees of co-existence but also very much of segregation and conflict.[2] As mapped by Malkit Shoshan's *Atlas of the Conflict* (Shoshan 2004), the demographic shifts that took place after the establishment of the state of Israel in 1948 signal a structural transformation in the urbanization of the territory, from a dispersed pattern of Arab setllements and a few Jewish centers to the opposite spatial distribution where Jewish settlements sprawled out and the Arab population that remained within the initial borders of Israel concentrated in cities such as Nazareth and Jaffa.

This dramatic change led to a split identity for Arab inhabitants, maintaining the Palestinian identity, yet adopting Israeli citizenship. During the Ottoman period, Nazareth counted 1500 inhabitants reaching a peak of 68% Christians by the 19th century. With the establishment of the state of Israel in 1948, the city became a refugee town and the ratio Christians-Muslims changed to 60% Muslims until today's 80,000-inhabitant city. Nazareth grew significantly from the influx of Palestinian refugees and became the largest Arab city within the initial borders of the Israeli state, yet Israel's planning attitudes to the city demonstrated an attempt to diminish the increase of a strong Arab urban presence. In the process of developing official planning tools for Nazareth, the Israeli government named the streets of the city by anonymous numbers while the city's inhabitants continue operating by the collective memory of unofficial street names. New neighborhoods for refugees from all over the region were built with inadequate planning tools, lacking basic infrastructure such as roads, collective spaces, public buildings and more and soon turned into poor and underdeveloped parts of the city.

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[2] See also Yacobi, H. (2008) Separate and unequal. Israel's mixed cities have become a two-fold discrimination trap for their Arab residents. *Ha'aretz Newspaper,* Oct.17 and Yacobi, H. (2004) 'In-Between Surveillance and Spatial Protest: the Production of Space of the 'Mixed City' of Lod,' *Surveillance & Society* 2(1): 55-77

Figure 1. Population distribution in 1947, Left: Distribution of Palestinian Population, Right Map: Distribution of Jewish Population, From Shoshan M. (2010), *Atlas of the Conflict Israel-Palestine* (Rotterdam: 010 Publishers)

Figure 2. Population distribution in 2010, Left: Distribution of Palestinian Population, Right Map: Distribution of Jewish Population, From Shoshan M. (2010), *Atlas of the Conflict Israel-Palestine* (Rotterdam: 010 Publishers)

In 1954, in a nation-wide effort to contain Arab presence within the country's borders, the government built a settlement of 300 Jews on the hill adjacent to Nazareth. The newly established Nazareth-Ilit, meaning Upper Nazareth, grew with immigration flows until the war of 1973, after which population declined again. Today the relationship between Nazareth and Nazareth-Ilit is double-sided with Nazareth-Ilit's municipality following the national policy of providing a counter-weight to the Arab identity of Nazareth (Rabinowitz 1997).
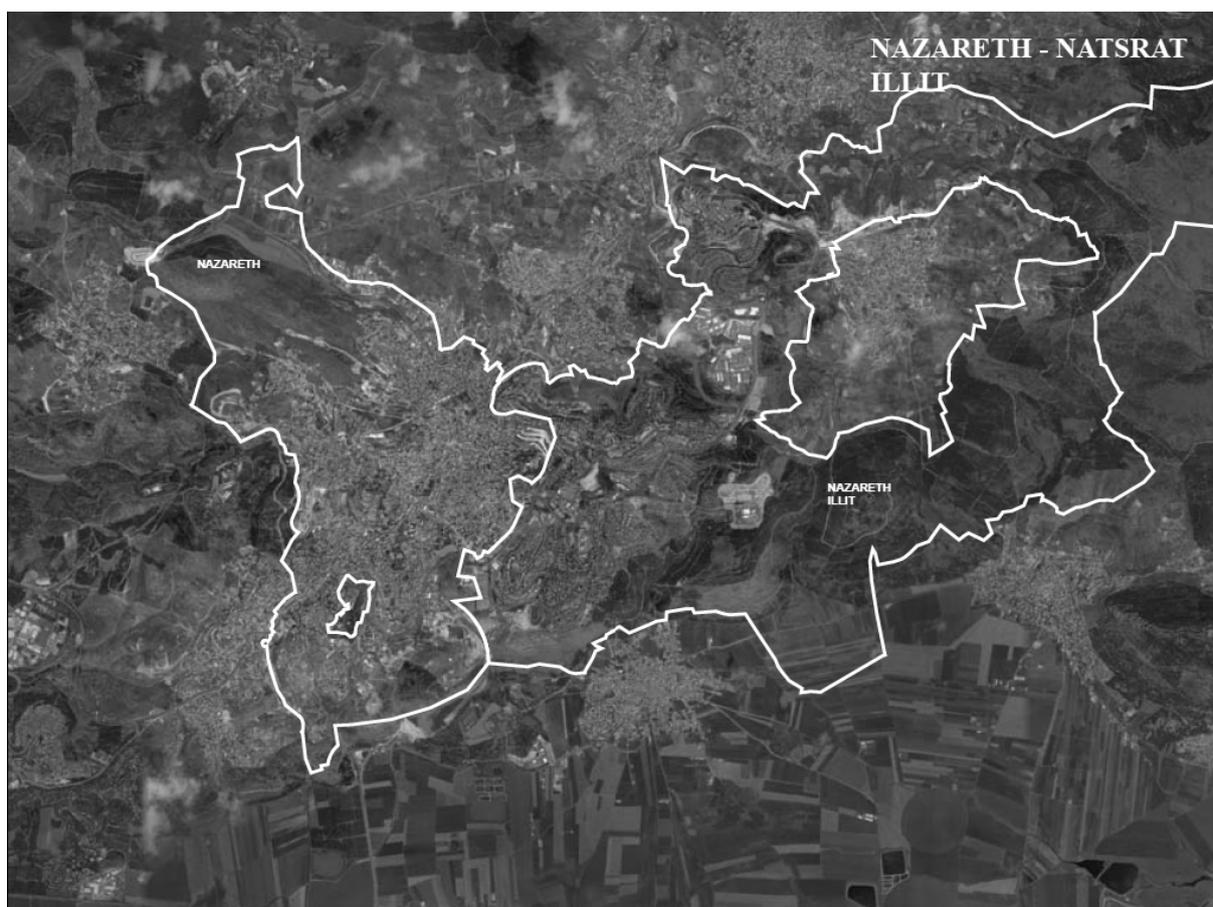

Figure 3. Aerial View indicating borders of Nazareth (left) and Nazareth Ilit (right), Orthophoto 2012, Courtesy of Nazareth Municipality

On the other hand, real-estate values in Nazareth have risen because of a lack of available land due to a combination of strong topographic limitations and a land ownership situation whereby the majority of land is owned by churches and by the Israel land authority. This situation has encouraged Nazareth's inhabitants to migrate to Nazareth Ilit's more attractive housing stock, combining lower densities[3] with more recently constructed buildings and better accessibility.

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[3] 1322 people per square kilometer in Nazareth Ilit as opposed to 4666 people per square kilometer in Nazareth

Figure 4. View from Nazareth to Nazareth Ilit and the Court of Justice Building overlooking Nazareth, photographer: Yuval Tebol, 2012

The same conflicted identity can be perceived in the evolution of collective spaces in the Israeli Arab city. While the origin of Nazareth's collective spaces inherent to the provision for basic needs such as shade, water, trade and protection from intrudors, the meaning of collective space shifted with the added layer of religion and myth, turning into symbols and spaces of representation. From the Ottoman rule to the British Mandate and finally the establishment of the Israeli state, the city's collective spaces transformed and challenged the notion of embedded collective spaces into complex and varied forms of voids, ranging from a centrifugal 'space of risk' (Jabareen 2006) to a junction of temporary moments of exchange and a neutral and well-tempered environment.

In the last few decades, Nazareth's local municipality together with the Israeli government have initiated a series of urban design projects re-imagining the city's collective spaces from infrastructural changes to redesigning public spaces. These initiatives have largely disregarded the city's intrinsic spatial characteristics. In parallel and partially due to this, these spaces have become the stage for conflict, political disputes, religious tension and violent actions.[4] In what follows, I will expand on the spatial mechanisms of a conflicted city and how this has led to a propagation of new forms of collective space. Zooming in on three prototypes of contemporary collective space in Nazareth, I will consider three distinct frameworks of collective life and their meaning for a city of conflict.

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[4] See David Harvey's argument that public space has political repercussions only when public, quasi-public and private spaces are interconnected., and 'contestation over the construction, meaning and organization of public space' only happens when it affects and transforms private and commercial spaces (Harvey 2005)

City of Gods

While Nazareth is considered a city in statutory terms under Israel's jurisdiction, at many levels it lacks basic components to ensure urban coherence due to a high degree of deficiency in infrastructure, transportation, distribution of services and accessible collective spaces. This intricate lack of continuity has led to a physical fragmentation which appears to be a suitable habitat for a wide variety of religious communities including Copts, Greek-Orthodox, Greek-Catholic, Roman-Catholic, traditional and progressive practices of the Islam and in adjacent Nazareth-Ilit secular, Orthodox and Haredi Jews. Based on a series of interviews conducted with inhabitants over the last two years, the neighborhood unit appears to be the strongest entity of belonging, and is measured by ethnic-religious identity of its inhabitants, the period in which it was built, the building typologies, its regional accessibility, its religious center and the reachability of the commercial heart of the city, Paulus VI street. Each individual or group operates according to a distinct urban constellation associated with a different religious belief. Therefore we can consider Nazareth as a patchwork of urban entities, an urban patchwork of many Gods, each with their own, often dysfunctional, urban structure. A map of Nazareth from the Ottoman period visualizes this city of Gods, then still clearly organized in religious quarters, monasteries, an orphanage, churches and a mosque.
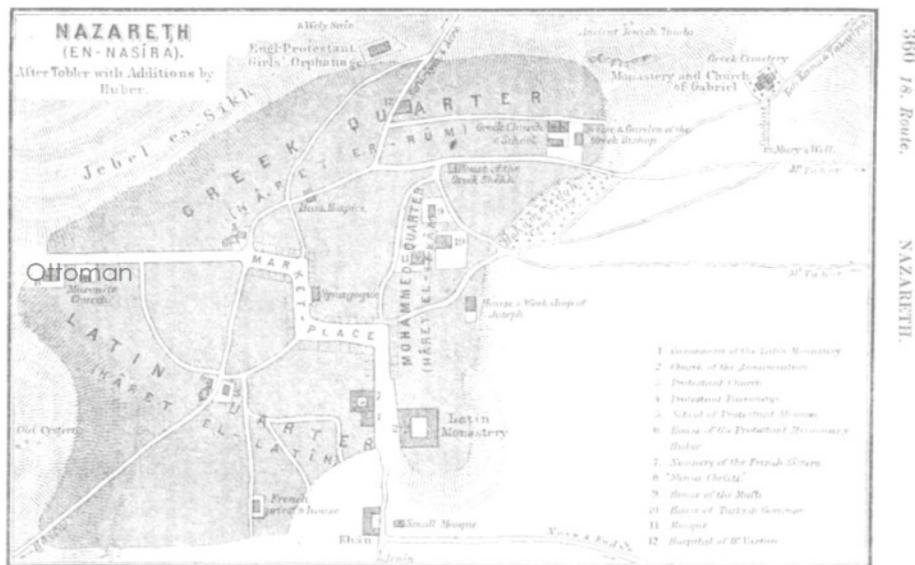

Figure 5. Ottoman Map of Nazareth, indicating religious quarters, from the Municipal Archives.

This historical Ottoman structure has now developed into a more complex urban constellation, from quarters to religious patches that overlap and interfere. As an additional 'layer' to this patchwork, religious tourism predisposes the city's urban development in preference of the simulacrum, a symbolic representation of a variety of imagined pasts. With 100,000 visitors per year, Nazareth is underequipped to fully take advantage of the influx of tourists, mainly pilgrims, who usually stay only a few hours, due to inadequate tourist infrastructure and a lack of information. Despite its underdeveloped accessibility and transportation infrastructure, Nazareth functions in many ways as the 'capital' of the Galil, attractive to both Arabs and Jews as a commercial center, a culinary destination, and more recently a center for Israeli and international backpackers and secular tourists lodging in the old city's Ottoman townhouses.

The simulacrum serving religious tourism thereby coexists alongside a palimpsest of historical authenticity on the base of which urbanity still thrives, a condition that is very rare in the Israeli urban landscape, in which historical traces have been wiped out, turned into ruins, or transformed into artificial commercial destinations. In addition, the Arab population in the Galil region has developed itself as an attractive grounds for the Israeli hi-tech industry, providing affordable and highly skilled human resources in the fields of IT and programming for which Nazareth has become a center. More recently, the Israeli Ministry of Higher Education approved a plan of the Nazareth Municipality to create a new academic campus that will provide higher education in Arabic, currently non-existing within the borders of Israel. These projects of science, technology and education provide a unique opportunity to re-consider Nazareth's collective infrastructure and think beyond its potential as a pelgrims' destination.

The Question of Public Space

In today's Nazareth, visitors, passers-by and inhabitants continuously experience the city's urban voids, left-over spaces in-between a multiplicity of urban patches, sites that have been under dispute, that belong to many or to none. Sites where construction has started but was interrupted, and frozen in time. Properties where the family owning the land has grown so big it becomes impossible to reach an agreement on future plans. Fields of a wild and uninhabited landscape interrupting a dense and vibrant urban context, sometimes re-claimed temporarily by informal construction, graffiti, or wild growth of local species. Are these spaces the fertile grounds on which new metropolitan-scale urbanity can be imagined?

Nazareth's rich history of collective spaces can offer a clue for re-visiting the possibilities of these terrains. In a study of Mediterranean urban and building codes, Besim S. Hakim describes the *fina,* 'an invisible space about 1.00–1.50m wide alongside all exterior walls of a building which is not attached to other walls, and primarily alongside streets and access paths (Hakim 2008: 28)'. Extending horizontally but also vertically alongside a building's walls, the owner has rights and privileges over this outdoor space.

This margin between the public and the private realm can be traced back to pre-Islamic history in Arab cities and re-appears in Muslim jurisdiction and in Near-Eastern, North-African and Spanish literature. Although the *fina* itself remained invisible, its special status came to expression in 3-dimensional additions to building facades, not necessarily claiming the public realm but rather creating an inhabitable public space, with built-in benches, planters for vegetation, balconies, bay windows and rooms bridging streets.

Hakim's account of the Mediterranean urban code adds an important aspect to the meaning of collective space in Nazareth, as a space that is hosted and supported by the private realm and cannot exist without it. Therefore we can ask whether and if so in what format collective space in Nazareth can exist without the strong support of a surrounding and nurturing private urban realm.

To answer this question let us further investigate three motifs that guide the genealogy of Nazareths collective spaces: water infrastructure, well-tempered environments and spaces of exchange. From the original agricultural village until today's complex urban patchwork, water has guided the city's urban development, from a primitive water well located at walking distance from the center of the village, to a hamam (bathing house), to the source of holy water from Mary's Well and during the Ottoman period a system of underground watering and irrigation canals, from an elementary need for human existence (drinking and washing) to a religious icon and eventually a network of urban and agricultural infrastructure.

A second motif are the open spaces that exist within the dense urban fabric, as enclosed inner courtyards and walled gardens, an urban condition where open collective spaces exist on private property, owned by tradesmen, churches and mosques.

Figure 6. Photograph of Fina Space in Nazareth's Old City, Photographer: Yuval Tebol, 2012
Figure 7. Map of Landownerships in Nazareth, Archives of the Nazareth Municipality

The spatial configuration of collectivity being hosted by privately owned space exemplifies a unique characteristic of the Middle-Eastern city, which should be understood in connection to the severity of the desert climate where human existence means a constant search for the well-tempered environment: shaded, ventilated, and protected from intruders. In addition, as can be seen on a plan of land ownerships in Nazareth, Churches own the majority of the city's open spaces, with the Israel Land Authority coming in second.

Thereby most potentially collective spaces are in private hands and only partially accessible for the city's inhabitants. A third component of Nazareth's collective spaces is that of exchange, moving from the Ottoman souk or street market, a junction of vendors and customers to other forms of exchange of information and knowledge, with the more recent development of a hi-tech campus and a new academic campus. These intrinsic motifs of Nazareth and I believe of the Middle-Eastern city at large: water infrastructure, well-tempered environments and spaces of exchange have been challenged by more recent attempts to organize the city's urban spaces. In addition, recent projects promoting religious tourism and pelgrimage, funded by European church communities, continue transforming the actual space into an imagined simulacrum, representing a Nazareth that never existed.[5]

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[5] See the recently completed Holy Mary Visitor's Center, a sequence of interior spaces using the latest hologram technologies to evoke life in Nazareth during the period of Holy Mary.

The story of Nazareth's collective spaces is not unique and fits in a wider discourse on the crisis of public space, whereby a new 'normativity' coming from the private realm invades the public sphere and thereby denationalizes formerly 'national state agendas,' or in this case collective spaces (Sassen 2008 [2006]). Yet in the case of Nazareth, the normativity of a private realm hosting collectivity is not new but rather embedded in the city's urban condition. The forms of collective spaces that existed here and the ones that replace them can contribute to recent scholarship on public space in that borders between private and public have always been challenged in Nazareth's collective spaces. In studying public space in the contemporary city at large, we have realizied that contemporary urban conditions require more complex definitions of public space, to accurately describe 'chance encounters, temporary spaces of gathering, partially accessible meeting places, commercialized and themed entertainment' (Segal and Verbakel 2008: 6). One first step has been to replace the all-encompassing concept of public space with a more flexible idea of collective space, which can take place indoors, or on private property, or as a moment in time. Moreover, 'the public' today is to be understood as a fragmentary composition of several stakeholders, individuals and collectivities. Habermas' idea of a public sphere as a place where one can reflect on opinions and ideas about society and the state that had emerged from 18th century Bourgeois society therefore requires rethinking in a consumption culture of individuality and privatization[6]. With this privatization of public space, democratic governance has diminished and given in to the predominance of consumption-oriented collective spaces such as shopping malls and lifestyle centers.[7] In a discussion on the question of the disappearance of public space, Stan Allen argues that public space in its traditional understanding should be approached with skepticism in the context of the American city. Allen argues that we should first replace public with *publics* and their 'spatial practices', a notion taken from Michel De Certeau, who distinguishes between space as an abstract notion, while place is practiced space. Therefore we should search for the potential of 'public places', a more bottom-up notion whereby the public creates its own public realm (Allen 2008). Not only in the American context scholars argue that traditional notions of public space no longer hold ground. Marcel Smets writes that public space has become an 'individual yet shared experience' and proposes a less ambitious definition of spaces where people meet people, which does not erase the concept of public space but rather multiplies it and transforms it into a temporary event. (Smets 2008). Sarah Whiting goes further by argueing that we should 'drop the false narrative of an original, 'pure', wholly public sphere and accept that (…) the public sphere is always very much intertwined with the private one' (Whiting 2008: 103). A study of non-Western urban conditions such as the Middle-Eastern City where public and private realms have always been intertwined, and where a multiplicity of publics has always existed, can give more insight in the arguments raised above.

In an effort to revive Foucault's concept of heterotopia, Michiel Dehaene and Lieven De Cauter argue that in a postcivial society public space as we know it no longer exists yet new forms of spaces for collective use have appeared in private spaces, such as shopping mals, sports centers, wastelands and parking lots.

"The contemporary transformation of the city displays a profound redrawing of the contours of public and private space, bringing to the fore an equally treacherous and fertile ground of conditions that are not merely hybrid, but rather defy an easy description in these terms". (Dehaene and De Cauter 2008: 3)

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[6] See Calhoun C., ed. (1992), *Habermas and the Public Sphere*, (Cambridge, MA, and London: MIT Press).
[7] See Kohn M. (2004) *Brave New Neighborhoods: The Privatization of Public Space*, (New York and London: Routledge)

Dehaene and De Cauter propose to re-examine Foucault's concept of heterotopiaas a 'crossroads of the lines that shape public space today.' In a world characterized by privatization, the crisis of the city means that the original polis which aspired an equilibrium between oikos or the private realm and agora or the public realm. In a postcivic society characterized by an advanced state of privatization the equilibrium no longer exists in what they call an 'economized public life.' Thus according to Dehaene and De Cauter, heterotopia can become a strategy to give meaning to spaces of otherness within a privatized environment. However, it remains unclear how a theory based on otherness can be sufficient to adequately grasp the complexity of collective spaces in cities of conflict. Otherness still implies a condition of sameness interrupted by the other as an exception. As David Harvey suggests, Foucault's theory of heterotopia remains superficial and in the end reduces itself to the theme of escape, leaving behind the promise of criticality, emancipation and libration (Harvey 2009). Cities of conflict develop on a premise of heterogeneity from the start, and thus the interruption of its hegemony requires a more precise definition. This study of Nazareth's collective spaces is an attempt to widen the idea of collective spaces that suspend dominant systems of control without necessarily providing ground for an identified otherness.

In what follows I will examine three significant prototypes of collective space that characterize Nazareth's urban condition each demonstrating a different relationship between spatial mechanisms and socio-political constellations.

Hot Spots

The three prototypes of collective spaces I will describe below are a result of recent planning efforts by public and private, local and national stakeholders and start with the plan of *Nazareth 2000*, a large scale urban renewal plan for Nazareth's Old City.

Figure 8. Plan for the *Nazareth 2000* project indicating the area to be treated. Rahamimoff, A (1995), *Nazareth 2000; Plan for the Development of Touristic Infrastructure 1995-1999,* (Nazareth: Nazareth Municipality & Ministry of Tourism)

Hostile Urban Voids

In 1993, the leftist government led by Itshak Rabin together with Nazareth's mayor Tawfeq Zayad initiated a seventy million US dollar project titled *Nazareth 2000,* in preparation of the millennium celebrations. The plan included a makeover of several streets and squares in the old city and entailed considerable changes in the infrastructure of the old city, replacing water and sewage pipes, communication and electricity lines and lighting systems. On a triangle of public land between Paulus VI sStreet and Casanova Street, adjacent to the Roman-Catholic Church of the Annunciation, the Nazareth 2000 plan proposed a redesign including an area for outdoor events. The proposed design provided a central square for the city both for inhabitants and visitors, and an entrance square to the Old City.[8]

Figure 9. Design for Central City Square, from Rahamimoff, A (1995), *Nazareth 2000; Plan for the Development of Touristic Infrastructure 1995-1999,* (Nazareth: Nazareth Municipality & Ministry of Tourism)

However when construction started in 1999, the square's location, adjacent to the shrine of Shihab-el-Din, nephew of Saladin who ousted crusaders eight centuries earlier, caused the Muslim community to protest, claiming that the land belonged to the Waqf. On April 16 1999, riots broke out over the municipal plan on the square leading to clashes between Muslims and Christians.

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[8] See Rahamimoff, A (1995), *Nazareth 2000; Plan for the Development of Touristic Infrastructure 1995-1999,* (Nazareth: Nazareth Municipality & Ministry of Tourism)

The Israeli government decided to compromise and to allow the construction of a mosque on the square yet soon after the laying of the first cornerstone, Russian president Putin, American president Bush and eventually the Pope intervened and construction of the mosque stopped.

In this process, Jabareen argues, the city square became a space of risk, a public space where inhabitants feel low levels of trust, defenseless and vulnerable. According to Jabareen, the plan itself caused such a change in levels of trust and brought into being a new type of public space, caused by an incongruence between conceived space and lived space, according to Lefebvre's theory.[9] I propose to add another dimension to this definition by arguing that the feeling of risk led to a lived space that turned into a hostile urban void.
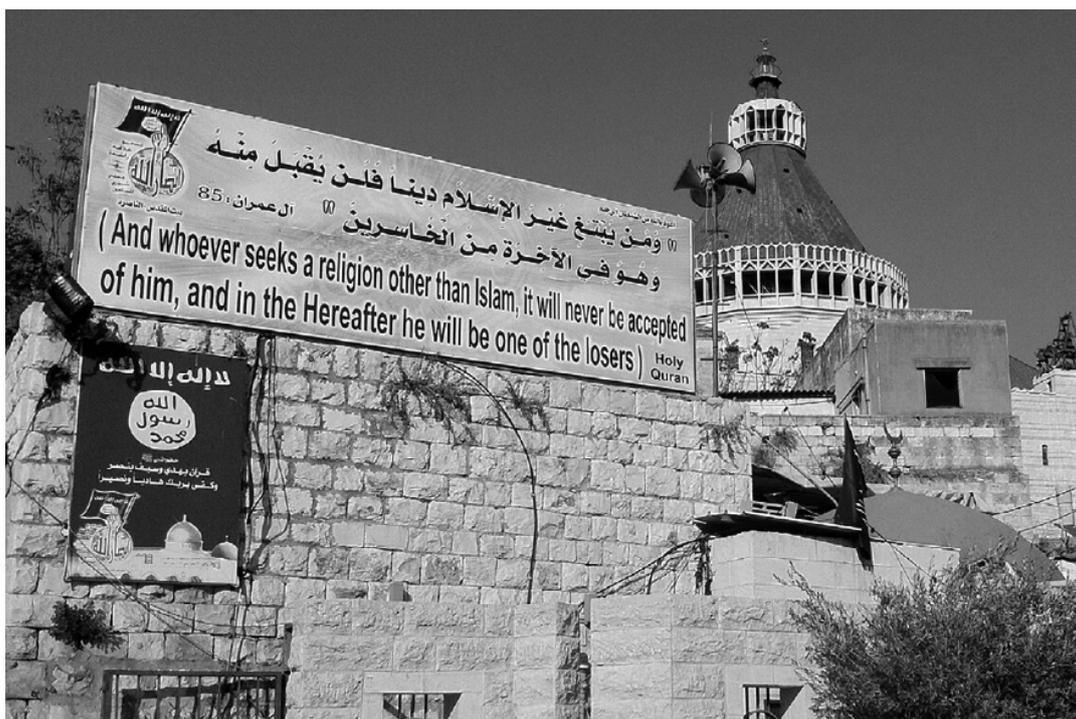

Figure 10. Claiming the Square, 2010, Photographer: Nick Verbeeck

While *hostile* refers to the very often negative and sometimes violent actions of some religious communities against others, *void* stems from the building of an urban space that does not grow from its surrounding urban fabric, neither does it replace the lack of connection with built space.

Therefore I will expand Jabareen's argument, and claim that it is also the specific form of the proposed square that caused the space to become a void, an un-hosted open space, and therefore a hostile void. The architects responsible for the design of the *Nazareth 2000* plan based their drawings on typologies of medieval, renaissance and 19th century European urban space: piazzas, fountains and tree-lined streets and boulevards, thereby forcing an artificial layer of alien urban spaces upon the existing city fabric, not taking into account the intertwined relationship between private and public spaces of the existing city.

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[9] See Lefebvre, H. (1992) [1974], *The Production of Space,* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell)

Figure 11. Panoramic View of the Central City Square in 2008, Photographer: Yaacub Nweisser

Figure 12. Panoramic View of the Central City Square in 2008, Photographer: Yaacub Nweisser

Figure 13. Aerial View of Mary's Well Square and the Greek Orthodox Church of the Annunciation, Orthophoto 2012, Courtesy of Nazareth Municipality

Figure 14. Mary's Well Square, Photograph by Yuval Tebol, 2012
Figure 15. Mary's Well Square Christmas Market, December 2011, Nazareth Tourist Association

The Junction

A second collective space included in the *Nazareth 2000* project provided an alternative connection between the city's main commercial spine Paulus VI Street, and the Old City. The design included an open space in front of the Greek Orthodox Church of the Annunciation bordered by commercial street facades, a traffic node leading cars from Paulus VI Street into the Old City, and an open space around Mary's Well, bordering Paulus VI Street and the Ottoman Hammam or bathing house.[10]

Today, this series of collective spaces has transformed into a vibrant city center, where tourists arrive and enter the Old City, but also where locals meet at bars and coffee places. Furthermore, the space has become the center for a lively program of events for locals and tourists ranging from a yearly Christmas market attracting tens of thousands of visitors to music events and trade fairs.

Figure 16. Mary's Well Square Music Festival 2012, Nazareth Tourist Association

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[10] See Rahamimoff, A (1995), *Nazareth 2000; Plan for the Development of Touristic Infrastructure 1995-1999,* (Nazareth: Nazareth Municipality & Ministry of Tourism)

Even though significant parts of the historical city were altered, excavated and changed by building a new collective space here, the design of a continuous open space, connecting the main commercial and traffic artery of Paulus VI Street with the square in front of the Greek Orthodox church, and further into the streets of the Old Ciy, has allowed every segment of the collective space to be intertwined with a street edge of public, religious, touristic or commercial functions and has facilitated a continuous vehicular and pedestrian flow.

Figure 17. Panoramic view of Mary's Well Square, 2008. Photographer: Yaacub Nweisser

Thereby, perhaps unintentionally, the collective spaces created by this plan almost seamlessly continue the urban memory of Mary's Well into a junction where the metropolitan region and the Old City meet.

The tempered space

In July 2009, 6 years after the completion of the *Nazareth 2000* project, the city of Nazareth inaugurated the BIG Fashion shopping center at an exclusive cocktail party with speeches and ribbon cutting. Hundreds of people from the Arab community raised the glass to celebrate the 24,000 square meter complex, including 12,000 square meters of retail space, housing 90 stores, built by a consortium of developers including the Israeli chain BIG shopping centers, real estate giant Africa – Israel and Nazareth based B.S.T. development and construction.

Figure 18. Aerial View of the BIG Fashion shopping center, Orthophoto 2012, Courtesy of Nazareth Municipality

The center was built on property of the Greek Orthodox Church, who will earn eighteen percent of the center's revenue. The shopping center is strategically located on a site at the express road serving both Nazareth and Nazareth Ilit, and can easily be reached by a new access road and tunnel system from the South of the Galil region. Thereby the center aims at all communities in the surrounding metropolitan area. As BIG shopping centers' president notes: 'The center sits in the heart of the Arab Israeli sector, and serves people whose religious days of rest are Friday, Saturday and Sunday. We gain benefit from all of them.'[11] Here the private market benefits from promoting coexistence and heterogeneity. As Alex Wall argues in a study of the lifestyle center as the twenty first century continuation of shopping malls, developers took on the task of building collective spaces where public authorities were unable or unwilling to do so. Looking at European and Souteast Asian case studies, Wall questions whether private development can take responsibility over the public realm (Wall 2008).

Figure 19. BIG Fashion shopping center in its urban context, taken from the website of BIG shopping centers.

The design of BIG Fashion shopping center creates a very tempered, neutral space without being completely interiorized and artificial, by organizing sequences of shops around four partially shaded courtyards that meet in a central collective area. Employees in the center come from all religious sectors, thereby encouraging the profitable heterogeneity aimed at by the initiators of the project. Field work at different points in time over the last year have shown that most areas in the center are visited by all communities of the surrounding neighborhoods, Jews, Muslims and Christians alike. In an interview with architecture journalist Noam Dvir, Moshe Tzur, architect of the BIG Fashion shopping center explained how the design aimed to provide a piece of urban fabric, that relates to the character of Nazareth, even in the choice of materials including natural stone and local trees. (Dvir 2009). Tzur's plan includes a wider and a narrower street, the latter as a reference to the souk in Nazareth's Old City.

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[11] See Friedman, R (2009) Country's first open-air shopping mall opens in Nazareth, *Jerusalem Post, July 17*

Rather than a sterile simulacrum, disconnected from its context, the BIG Fashion center puts forward a hybrid between a neutral, well-tempered compound and a – be it superficial – understanding of Nazareth's urban memory. In 2012, a children playground was added on the roof of the shopping center, thereby enhancing the potential of the complex to be more than a commercial center. Nevertheless, while the complex provides a well-tempered neutral environment of exchange for visitors from different cultural, religious and ethnic backgrounds, the design of the space remains limited as a self-sufficient enclosed and introvert environment. The complex does not relate to its immediate or remote urban context.

Furthermore, the collective spaces' primary purpose is commercial and falls short in providing a base for non-commercial social interaction and exchange. Nevertheless, the economically very successful experiment opens up a wide range of possibilities for win-win situations where socio-cultural heterogeneity benefits the private market.

To conclude, the three collective spaces described above can be considered prototypes for the future urban cohesion of the city of Nazareth, each one in their own way a 'hot spot,' from easily inflammable, to an area of exchange and eventually a tempered micro-climate. Their different degrees of success, whether social or economic and a spatio-temporal understanding of their connection with the city's complex spatial mechanisms provide a very compelling set of challenges for developing future urban design strategies.

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