

# A City for Itself: A Peripheral Mixed City's Struggle for Cultural Capital

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Based on the case study of a Fringe theatre festival in a peripheral city in Israel, this article identifies and analyzes a moment of change in power relations between a peripheral city and the country's central city. It offers an alternative perspective to urban discourse, which analyzes art projects in peripheral cities as duplicating colonial relations. We adapted the Marxist concept of a *class in itself* and a *class for itself*, from the socioeconomic realm to the urban realm, by using Bourdieu's field theory as a link between the sociology of art and the urban realm. We argue that by taking control over the festival's productive forces, the city evolved from a *city in itself* to a *city for itself*. Drawing on ethnographic fieldwork and architectural research, the article analyzes four decades of urban dynamics leading to this change and proposes a theoretical and methodological framework for deciphering contemporary urban process.

# INTRODUCTION

Many studies have argued that art projects imported into peripheral cities have served to rewrite colonial patterns of social power relations (Mclean 2014; Morgan and Ren 2012; Olsen 2017; Peck 2005; Pollock and Paddison 2010). Such projects have been rejected by local communities, which have perceived them as external to their culture (Grodach et al. 2014; Shaw and Sullivan 2011). In the long run, they have led to gentrification (Deener 2007; Ley 2003; Osman 2016) and deprived local residents by raising prices and undermining the city's customary lifestyle (Bodnar 2015; Zukin 1998). This argument has also been made regarding the present research arena, asserting that the Fringe Theatre Festival in Acre, a peripheral mixed-city in Israel, reproduces social power relations (Shem-Tov 2016) and creates a spatial separation between the artists and local residents (Yavo-Ayalon et al. 2018).

Contrary to these claims, the present research identifies a moment at which multifaceted, long-term artistic activity promoted a change in power relations. Identifying and conceptualizing a moment of change is a challenging task. We address this challenge by employing a Marxist perspective and specifically the concepts of *class in itself* and *class for* 

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*itself* (Marx and Engels 1848:211). Marx's inspirational theory offers insights to capture the elusive moment of change, to understand transformations that are social, material, and consciousness-related, and to decipher the moment at which a social group transforms from subject to agency. Whereas Marx employed these concepts in economic contexts, we use Bourdieu's field theory (Bourdieu 1993a) as a link between the sociology of art and the urban sphere and use it to analyze the case study of Acre: a city with abiding theatre activity and institutions. The struggle over the Fringe Theatre Festival, we argue, constituted an organizing framework in which a peripheral city was able to take an important step towards artistic independence and, in doing so, took an important step towards transforming from *a city in itself* to *a city for itself*.

What do we mean when we refer to a *city for itself*? Who and what is the "city"? How can a "city" become an active agent? The aim of this transposition is neither to create a simplistic equation nor to anthropomorphize the city, but rather to emphasize the ways in which a city is composed of both physical and social structures. In the spirit of urbansociology, we view the city as an organization made both by social and physical layers, which "mutually interact in characteristic ways to mold and modify one another" (Park 1915:578). The "city," in this sense, is the combination of the built environment and its social fabric. A *city in itself* and *for itself* relates to the mutually constitutive relationship between social power groups within the city on the one hand, and the built environment in which they live on the other. This might seem as a metaphor initially, but we argue that there is more than a metaphor here. We will build this argument throughout the paper by exploring the circumstances and nuances that led the city to take the reins and assume control of the main artistic event—the Fringe Theatre Festival. We will show how the same six components of change that we identify in the original Marxist theory can be identified and translated into the urban dynamics.

Whereas Tel Aviv is the economic and cultural center of Israel, Acre, a medium-sized "mixed-city"<sup>1</sup> located in close proximity to Israel's northern border, is both geographically and socially peripheral. With a socioeconomic ranking of 4 out of 10, Acre has a high unemployment rate and an average monthly wage below the national average (CBS 2015a). These conditions have created a negative stigma for the city, which, despite its architectural and scenic assets as a coastal city and a World Heritage Site, continues to contend with these complex challenges.

In the 1980s, a group of artists from Tel Aviv established a Fringe Theatre Festival to serve as an alternative stage for original, ground-breaking works that, from its peripheral location, would challenge the sleepy mainstream theatre scene. Acre's marginal location and the unique spaces within the historic citadel inspired the artistic community, and a government policy of decentralization of art into the periphery endorsed the artistic initiative. Since then, the festival has been held annually in Acre, with artistic content being shaped by theatre artists from Tel Aviv and an audience hailing largely from the same milieu. In 2017, due to political disagreement regarding the content of the festival's plays, the Tel Aviv artists' community boycotted the festival, claiming that Acre's municipality promotes censorship and limits their artistic freedom of expression. Nonetheless, and perhaps as a result, the city, for the first time in the festival's history, decided to hold the festival on its own, using the artistic medium acquired over the years to redefine its status vis-à-vis the "center." That is to say, contrary to the widespread claim reiterated in many studies that the peripheral city plays a passive role in external artistic projects imported to it, we identify a moment at which the city created agency and took control over the

cultural resource. This raises the question: How did Acre go from being a passive subject, in which elite groups from the center did as they pleased, to an active agent in the artistic realm? Inspired by Marxist theory, we analyze this urban dynamic and attempt to identify the circumstances in which the city transformed from a *city in itself* to a *city for itself*.

Drawing on ethnographic fieldwork combined with architectural historical research, the paper analyzes the process of change in the city's status. The paper consists of two major parts, which are also its two main contributions. The first is a theoretical framing in which, inspired by three generations of Marxist theory, we articulate the process of a class becoming a *class for itself* and propose our adaption of this process to the urban realm. The second is a case study in which we show how the peripheral mixed-city of Acre underwent this urban transformation over a period of almost four decades. Applying this analytical framework to the case study at hand exemplifies the paper's second contribution as a methodological tool for deciphering widespread contemporary urban process. To make a coherent connection between the paper's two parts we distilled the original Marxist theory into six components and built the theoretical framework and the case study following those same six components. In a manner the case study part follows the same six components identified in the theoretical part. In conclusion, we return to theory, and discuss the role of art in this process. To enhance the clarity of our argument, we include schemas that provide a visual summary of the processes elaborated in the text and that illustrate our analysis and the intertwining nature of the two processes.

### THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

The transposition we suggest here was inspired by three generations of Marxist readings: the classical economic reading; neo-Marxist critical theory, which broadens the critique to its cultural political context; and current adaptations of critical urban discourse that link class struggles to cultural capital in cities. Based on these readings, we draw attention to a parallel process of the awakening of urban-consciousness.

#### A CLASS IN ITSELF, A CLASS FOR ITSELF, AND THEATRE AS CAPITAL

"Economic conditions had first transformed the mass of the people of the country into workers. The combination of capital has created for this mass a common interest. This mass is thus already a class against capital, but not yet for itself. In the struggle ..., this mass becomes united, and constitutes itself as a class for itself." (Marx and Engels 1848:211)

Marx based his theory on the dichotomy of two classes: big capitalists, or the bourgeoisie, who are in exclusive possession of the means of production; and the proletariat—"the class of the propertyless"—who are compelled to sell their labor to the capitalist class and are therefore submissive and completely dependent on them (Marx and Engels 1848:100). The proletariat is a *class in itself* consisting of economically differentiated individuals who are unaware of their oppressed socio-historical and economic condition and are condemned to play a passive, subordinate role (Lukcas 1920:6). While historically the bourgeoisie developed class-consciousness and abolished feudal society by acquiring the productive forces and creating a *class for themselves* as the foundation for

bourgeoisie/capitalist society, the proletariat, according to Marx, was still in the process of becoming a *class for itself* (Edward 1983:580).

Marx's inspirational theory of *class in itself/for itself* has been the subject of interpretation, extrapolation, and application since its inception. Classical Marxist interpretations have defended and expanded his use of the terms (Cohen 1978; Dos-Santos 1970). Others have been critical of Marx for making a problematic distinction and an inconsistent argument (Edward 1983; Przeworski 1977). But while classical readings have focused on the economic realm and maintained that "a person's class is established by nothing but his objective place in the network of ownership relations" (Cohen 1978:76), neo-Marxist readings have expanded their critique to a broader cultural and social realm as a more sophisticated means of oppression. Scholars of the Frankfurt school, such as Horkheimer and Adorno (1944), emphasized the "superstructure"—constituted by ideology, culture, politics, and religion—as a derivative of the capitalist economic infrastructure. The dominant capitalist group, they argue, maintains their power and domination by disseminating ideas that support the existing order and cultivating false consciousness through uniform commercialized mass culture, which creates a false sense of equality and maintains the status quo (Horkheimer and Adorno 1944:106; Marcuse 1964).

Social critical theory was adapted to the urban realm by a tradition of scholars who viewed urbanism as a product of class struggles over the right to space and resources (Brenner 2009; Lefebvre 2016; Schmid 2018), focusing on exposing the hegemonic nature of capitalist arrays and the ways in which dominant groups dictate the living conditions of underprivileged urban communities (Castells 1977; Lefebvre 1974). They emphasized the mundane everyday practices through which this cultural domination is achieved, on the one hand (Lefebvre 1974), and the universal neo-liberal and economic character of urban struggles that results in ranking a city's achievements on an economic global scale, on the other (Harvey 1973). Bourdieu's field theory and the conceptualization of other forms of capital (economic, social, cultural, and symbolic) (1987:4) serve as a link between these three generations of Marxist thinking and our adaptation of Marxist forces of production to urban struggles. As culture has emerged as an important factor in the economy, lifestyle, and the branding of cities (Zukin 1998), the field of cultural production has come to play a dominant role in shaping urban space and urban struggles. Moreover, these struggles within artistic fields reflect changing power relations between social sectors in greater society. As Wacquant (2018) has recently argued, Bourdieu's powerful formulation of the society-space relationship has not yet exhausted itself, and is still very much relevant to urban studies in particular.<sup>2</sup> Indeed, his influential theorization has served to analyze the distribution of different forms of capital in neighborhoods (Bridge 2006), housing and education choices (Bridge 2001), the seclusion of elites in upscale quarters (Pinçon-Charlot and Pinçon 2018), and spatial segregation in cities (Marom 2014; Pereira 2018). These examples use Bourdieu's vocabulary to interpret urban processes and spaces (Marom 2014). In a similar manner, we use Bourdieu's notion of the "field" to link art production and urban space within a Marxist framework. "The structure of the field is a state of the power relation among the agents and institutions engaged in the struggle ... a state of distribution of the specific capital which has been accumulated in the course of previous struggles..." (Bourdieu 1993b:73).

The distribution of cultural capital as a means of domination is linked to current critiques of culture-led urban regeneration strategies, enabling readings—such as those of Pereira (2018), Savage et al. (2018), and Zukin (1998) (to name just a few)—of uneven urban development through the lens of cultural capital. Current critical theory suggests that such art projects implemented in peripheral cities by governmental initiative usually use cultural capital as a tool for imposing ideas and domination. In the Israeli context, Bourdieu's field theory helps us connect the center-periphery relations in the national sense to the development in the field of art, framing the relationship between the established dominant theatre field in the central city and the emerging local theatre field in the peripheral city, as the second being a fractal part of the first. Its growth and struggle take shape inside and against the established part of the field. In that sense the relationship between the dominant central parts of the theatre field to the emerging fragile one in the periphery is one expression of the struggle between center and periphery, in the national scale. As articulated by Shils (1975:3), the center serves as the source of authority and legitimacy in which material, human, symbolic, and cultural capital are concentrated, and the periphery accepts the center's authority and ideas without taking part in their creation or dissemination. In many cases, periphery is constructed as a social category that later becomes part of the local residents' identity, in its stereotypical association with "low culture" (Shields 1991:5). In Israel, the Middle Eastern or Arab culture of residents of the periphery was perceived as "low culture," inferior to that of the western European culture produced primarily in Tel Aviv, Israel's cultural center (Cohen and Aharon-Gutman 2014; Regev 2000; Yiftachel and Tzfadia 2004).<sup>3</sup>

Critiques regarding artistic projects in peripheral cities argue that they alienate the inhabitants of these cities (Grodach and Silver 2012; Mclean 2014; Morrison 2018; Olsen 2017; Shaw and Sullivan 2011), sometimes to the point of violent conflict (Wilson and Keil 2008:xl). Theatre festivals are no exception, as they tend to demarcate social boundaries using programs of "high art" as a distinctive tool (Jamieson 2004; Quinn 2005; Waterman 1998; Willems-Braun 1994). Shem-Tov has analyzed Acre's Fringe Theatre Festival through this Bourdieusian perspective, as a tool used by elites to exert their dominance, arguing that tastemakers from a Tel Aviv-based elite group use art as cultural capital to strengthen and establish its superior status vis-à-vis the local peripheral urban population (Shem-Tov 2016).

Contrary to the line of thought highlighting the manner in which festivals duplicate existing social structures, this article focuses on a moment of change in these power relations. It does so by venturing back to the Marxist origins of this discourse and extracting the components that enable *a class in itself* to become *a class for itself*.

# TRANSPOSING MARX TO THE CITY: FROM CLASS-CONSCIOUSNESS TO URBAN CONSCIOUSNESS

Though acknowledging these strata of Marxist theory in the course of our research, we also realize that there is no clear definition or mutual agreement regarding the meaning of these concepts. For the sake of our analysis, we extracted six components of Marxist theory that together, though not necessarily as distinct separate stages or in the order presented here, have the potential to spark an awakening of class-consciousness and the formation of a *class for itself*. For each component, we first explain its original Marxist meaning and then propose its adaptation to the *"the city"* (as both a social and physical construct; see Figure 1), using Bourdieu's conceptualization as a link between class struggle and the urban struggle. In our case, the forces of production are forces of cultural



FIG. 1. Analytical framework: From Marxist theory to urban realm through Bourdieu's Field of cultural production [Color figure can be viewed at wileyonlinelibrary.com]

production, and the struggle is a struggle in the Israeli theatre field. Actors (this time, in the sociological sense) in this struggle are associated with the central global city or the peripheral city, inseparably linking this struggle to space and urban struggles.

1. An encounter between two classes must take place for the process to begin, as reflected in Marx's assertion that "... the antagonism between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie is a struggle of class against class" (Marx and Engels 1848:211). It is in the factory during the production process that the differences between the two classes arise and the relations of production take form. The position of each class in this encounter is clear: The bourgeoisie hold exclusive power over the productive forces, to which the proletariat lacks access. To become a class for itself, the proletariat needs to transform the relations of production by acquiring the "productive forces," which, according to Marx, are a combination of the physical, nonhuman means of production (raw materials, facilities, machinery) and the labor invested by humans (Marx and Engels 1848:105). Transposed into the urban realm through a Bourdieusian lens, the encounter is between the mixed peripheral city and cultural capital imported from the established theatre field in the central global city, the cultural capital being in our specific case, the theatre festival. During the cultural production of the festival, the peripheral local community encounters the hegemonic theatre field of the center, which controls the productive forces. At this stage, there is no local field of cultural production, and therefore the city possesses no cultural forces of production.

- 2. The lower class develops awareness of the suppressive conditions: This occurs when the proletariat realizes the capitalists' appropriation of the surplus value, the discriminatory conditions of their existence, and their inferior position within the relations of production. This awareness leads to the articulation of a political ideology and to means of overcoming the situation (Dos Santos 1970:181). Though they share similar socioeconomic conditions, this class is, at this stage, still divided by competition. In the urban context, the peripheral city becomes aware of the suppressive conditions when it comes to understand the value of the cultural capital. This awareness leads to the formation of a local theatre field, but at this stage, competition between local theatre institutions prevents urban action. Nonetheless, this awareness leads the newly born cultural leaders of the city to demand control over the festival's forces of production.
- 3. Communication between individuals with the same position in the class system occurs in the shared working space of the factory, which concentrates, in the same space, "a crowd of people unknown to one another..." (Marx and Engels 1848:210). Communication also facilitates the centralization of numerous local struggles into one national struggle. On the urban level, communication between the local theatre institutions that encompass the local theatre field, which share the same marginalized urban conditions, results in the centralization of numerous urban struggles.
- 4. Confrontation and friction due to continual conflict between the two classes—"For a class in itself to be able to emancipate itself the existing social relations would no longer be capable of existing side-by-side" (Marx and Engels 1848:211). Similarly, in the urban realm, continual conflict between the peripheral city's field of cultural production and its larger container theatre field from the central city results in friction and confrontation.
- 5. Unification in a struggle against a common enemy leads to a common notion of resistance. As Marx emphasizes, "only insofar as they have to carry on a common battle against another class" (Marx and Engels 1848:210) will the aggregated individuals unite. On the urban level, the city's local theatre field unites in a common struggle against the cultural capital imposed by the theatre field of the central city.
- 6. The combination of forces of several workers' associations halts competition among the workers and enables common action against the capitalist. In the urban realm, this dynamic is mirrored by the collaboration of several local theatre fields, which halts competition and enables urban action.

# METHODOLOGY

Conducted at the disciplinary juncture of the social sciences and urban studies, this study combines methods from both disciplines, specifically ethnographic fieldwork and architectural historical research. It draws on participant observation within five theatre institutions in Acre, as well as interviews conducted with representatives of each, officials of the municipality, and a diverse sample of artists (September 2014–2017). It also hinges on architectural historical research of primary and secondary materials related to the planning history of the city and the policies of these five institutions, including brochures, subscribers' lists, policy statements, media coverage, and social network comments. We distilled the data collected by these two frameworks of investigation into an analytical



**FIG. 2.** Forces of production in the field of cultural production [Color figure can be viewed at wileyonlinelibrary.com]

framework inspired by Marxist theory, suggesting a parallel terminology for use in urban discourse.

Our adaption of the six components of Marxist theory to the urban realm is elaborated in the lower section of Figure 1, whereas Figure 2 elaborates the forces of production required to produce cultural events in cities. Although the following four categories, inspired by Bourdieu's distribution of the specific capital, were derived from our ethnographic and urban research, we believe that, as a methodological tool, they might also be applicable to varied urban scenarios:

- (A) *Budget management*, including budgeting, budget allocation, fund raising, and the financing of gap loans.
- (B) Artistic selection, meaning responsibility for artistic content, the selection of performances and artists, and the distribution of prizes. This category corresponds to Bourdieu's notion of gatekeepers (Bourdieu 1984) and therefore relates to elements such as "taste," "standards," and considerations of "quality" that cast the event as "high art" as opposed to "low" or "popular" art.
- (C) *Artistic content* refers to the theatrical performances and their classification, through the decisions of artistic selection, into the following categories: competition shows, guest shows and outdoor events.
- (D) *Logistical support* includes all technical support related to de-facto production and the preparations of the city: i.e., city decorations, traffic control, catering services, and so forth.

In the findings section, we explain the urban process through which *a city in itself* transformed into *a city for itself*. For each of the stages, we examine the division of the abovementioned productive forces between two major parties: the peripheral mixed city, on the one hand, and the "combination of capital" (Marx 1848:211) represented by the hegemonic group from the central global city, on the other. We focus on the peripheral mixed-city of Acre as a physical and social construct, demonstrating this framework's application to a specific place and time. At the same time, we emphasize the framework's capacity to decipher the struggles of peripheral cities to change their status, which is a spreading worldwide urban phenomenon.

# CASE STUDY: THE AWAKENING OF URBAN CONSCIOUSNESS IN ACRE

### A CITY IN ITSELF: INTRODUCING THE PERIPHERAL MIXED CITY OF ACRE

Acre's geographically and socially peripheral location and the marginality, low socioeconomic status, and segregation patterns of its two constituent communities define it as a *city in itself*. The city's 48,000 population has an average monthly wage of NIS 6,400, compared to NIS 10,300 in Tel Aviv, and a fourth decile socioeconomic status ranking as opposed to Tel-Aviv's eighth decile (CBS 2015a, b). As such, it possesses no productive forces and no cultural capital of its own and is submissive to the mainstream or trends produced by Tel-Aviv, the country's economic and cultural center. Figure 3(a) shows the city's location in the northern Israeli coastal plain, which is peripheral due to its distance from Tel-Aviv, Israel's economic and cultural center. Figure 3(b) displays Acre's mixing patterns and low socioeconomic indicators, products of the Israeli state's historical policy of populating the periphery (Yiftachel and Yacobi 2003).

Until the 1948 war, Palestinians constituted a decisive majority of the city's population of 15,000. During the war, most of the city's Palestinian residents were expelled, and the remaining 3,000 were concentrated in the old city (Abbasi 2010). Israel's Zionist government, characterized by a political hegemony of European Jews, repopulated the city with Middle-Eastern Jewish immigrants (Waterman 1975:XVI) or "Mizrachi" Jews (Torstrick 2000). Mizrachi immigrants underwent a process of cultural erasure by which their ethnic identity was suppressed as backward and incongruous with the modern Europeanoriented state of Israel, in part due to its similarities with the local Palestinian-Arab culture (Chetrit 2010). Both populations were concurrently marginalized in the labor market and excluded from most of the means and forces of production (Swirski and Bernstein 1980).

This repopulation process is still evident in the structure of the city, which is divided into two main communities based on national-religious origin: 67 percent Israeli-Jewish and 28 percent Palestinian Arab (CBS 2015a). As shown in Figure 2(B), Palestinian Arabs still account for over 90 percent of the population of the Old City, while the newer northern and eastern neighborhoods are populated largely by Israelis. The division along the lines of national-political identity is also reflected in geographical vote distribution, which is reinforced by the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and prevailing socioeconomic relations. Whereas right-wing voters and higher socioeconomic rankings characterize Jewish majority areas, Arab majority areas have primarily left-wing voters and notably lower socioeconomic rankings.

Despite these segregation patterns, everyday life in Acre is based on a delicate equilibrium between these two main communities, both of which are characterized by marginalized urban identities and relatively low socioeconomic status. This fragile equilibrium is rattled each time the Israeli-Palestinian conflict escalates, leading to local tensions and sometimes culminating in acts of violence (Torstrick 2000:51).



FIG. 3. Peripheral location and mixing patterns of Acre [Color figure can be viewed at wileyonlinelibrary.com]



FIG. 4. Six components in the awakening of urban consciousness and the division of productive forces [Color figure can be viewed at wileyonlinelibrary.com]

# THE SIX COMPONENTS OF THE AWAKENING OF ACRE'S URBAN CONSCIOUSNESS

The process of Acre's transformation from a *city in itself* to a *city for itself* is presented below. As we will see, through this process the city's theatre field of cultural production gradually acquired proprietorship over all four productive forces, ultimately enabling it to actualize the urban action of producing the festival on its own. By so doing, it transformed from a passive peripheral agent to become an active agent in the Israeli theatre field and improved its status within this larger field towards more autonomy. Figure 4 illustrates the process to which we now turn.

1. The encounter with capital and acquisition of local productive forces—Acre had its first encounter with theatre as capital with the founding of the Fringe Theatre Festival in 1980. During this stage, the productive forces of the festival were in the hands of a group of young fringe artists who sought an alternative stage on which to perform as a way of challenging mainstream theatre. In Bourdieu's terms, these artists were new actors seeking a way into the Israeli theatre field by raising the flag of innovation. Acre's marginal location and reputation fit the fringe-theatre image they sought (Shem-Tov 2016). For the local community, though, they represented the hegemonic group from the center—artists from Tel Aviv financially supported by a left-wing government. They managed the finances and budget allocation, including the share contributed by the Acre Municipality, which accounted for 25 percent of

the festival's budget. An artistic committee under the auspices of Tel Aviv artists was responsible for selecting and producing the artistic content and for the logistical support. Acre was chosen as the stage due to its unique spaces and the oriental charm and aesthetics of the Old City. Local residents were at the bottom of the production array, serving as a source of labor, as ticket sellers and stage builders, and occasionally attending performances. For the most part, however, they were absent from the process; they did not understand the language of theatre, and were unaware of its value. Instead, they remained on the side-lines, stealing glances at those "crazy" artists from Tel Aviv "doing their crazy things." For them, the festival was "a spaceship that landed for a few days each year."<sup>4</sup>

Regardless of the city's passive role in the festival, and to some extent under its influence, these years witnessed the establishment of a local theatre field with the founding of three municipal theatre institutions in which the productive forces were concentrated primarily under the control of the city:

- *The City Auditorium*, established in 1981—This venue's artistic content is mainstream theatre shows from Israel's central region, but budgetary management, the selection of shows, and logistical support are the city's responsibility.<sup>5</sup>
- Acre Theatre Center, established in 1985 by a group of artists who had won the festival competition—These artists have worked in Acre for almost 40 years and control all the theatre's productive forces.<sup>6</sup>
- *The Acre Municipality's Cultural Department*, established in 1991 with the municipality's growing role in the festival—Initially, its role was limited to logistical support for the artists from the center. Its existence constituted an important stage in the city's accumulation of productive forces: It holds the logistical support for the festival—the first force of production.

Figure 5(a) shows the urban location of the emerging local theatre field and the distribution of productive forces within each institution.

2. Awareness and the demand for control of some of the productive forces-During the first two decades of the festival, local residents came to understand its surplus economic and cultural value. Moreover, the local theatre field gradually evolved. Initially, they accepted their inferior status in the production array. Over time, however, they developed an awareness of their imposed passivity and the artists' exploitation of the surplus value. These feelings persisted, evolving into criticism of the nonlocal festival management's use of the city. As explained by the director of the Municipal Cultural Department, "I understood that it was unacceptable for someone else to decide what to do with the city's money." In addition, local criticism emerged regarding the selection of artistic content, with claims that the left-wing Tel Aviv artists were not sufficiently sensitive to political content with the potential to spark unnecessary tensions and violence between the right-wing Mizrachi Jewish community and the city's Arab community. They also did not regard its emerging local theatre field as producers of culture. In the words of one local artist: "People with money pay artists to create in Acre. Why don't they give money to artists from Acre? Festival artists have funding; we are artists working here all year round-without money."7



**FIG. 5.** The formation of a local theatre field and the distribution of productive forces among them over the years [Color figure can be viewed at wileyonlinelibrary.com]

In 2000, growing urban awareness, along with central government dissatisfaction with financial deficits, resulted in entrusting budgetary management to Acre's Municipality, positioning the mayor and the Cultural Department's director at the top of the hierarchy, above the artistic management, and thereby placing the second force of production—budgetary control—in the hands of the local theatre field. The artists from the center, who underestimated the municipality as weak and as lacking managerial capacity and "taste," did not welcome the change. As explained by one of them: "The problem is not whether they will succeed in producing the festival, but rather what will be its message and its character" (Shem-Tov 2016:125). At this stage, the city was satisfied with its achievement and took no action to influence the festival as tastemakers. The Cultural Department director's assertion at the time of the change reflects this sense of inferiority:

"[C] ompetition shows," he explained, "are not supposed to be local 'community-center' productions."<sup>8</sup> His use of the degrading term "community-center production" testifies to concerns that local content would turn the festival into an amateur undertaking. This affirms that the separation between logistical support and artistic content is a manifestation of a more fundamental separation between "high" and "low" culture, which serves as a tool of domination. When it received control over the budget, the city received half of the productive forces. However, it still did not view itself as worthy of demanding control over the artistic content and its production.

- 3. Communication among a number of local theatre institutions—Over the years, additional theatre institutions were established in Acre, and communication among them became a spatial network of theatre activity that functions all year round. Creating, in fact, a local theatre field, which is a fractal portion of the central one. The newly established theatre field exists in the city, regardless of the festival; nevertheless it continues to define its values and standards vis-à-vis the central theatre field. The local theatre field is composed of institutions and agents, artists and politicians, and structured by the struggles within it as well as collaborative efforts among its members. Figure 5(c) shows the structure of this theatre field as a network of socio-spatial relations and the division of productive forces among them. In addition to the four institutions:
  - A high school theatre class, established in 1978, which was one of the first and most highly respected of its kind in Israel. Graduates of this class frequently participate in the festival.
  - A community theatre department in the academic college, which was established in 2012, operating within the local community since.

The working relations among these institutions are based on personal relations among the managers, who establish short-term cooperative efforts that are typically minimal and limited to solving technical problems. Like aggregates of the *class in itself*, which compete for wages and conditions of production, the city's theatre institutions compete for local audience and for funding. The response of the Auditorium manager, when asked about his working relations with the Theatre Center, reflected this dynamic: "The connection between us is only friendly—we know them and are colleagues, they're competitors... primarily over audience."<sup>9</sup> Within this local network, the Cultural Department distributes budgetary support to the other institutions and provides logistical assistance, centralizing the productive forces of theatre in the city unrelated to the festival.

4. Open conflict that leads to confrontation and a turning point—The year 2017 was a turning point due to a confrontation between the Tel Aviv artists' community and the city regarding the festival's artistic content. This urban confrontation can only be fully understood in light of events of the previous year. Then, Israel's minister of culture made accusations regarding a show's inciting nature, and Acre's mayor responded by explaining that "Acre's Municipality does not interfere with the artistic content of the festival and respects artistic freedom of expression ..., "<sup>10</sup> thus reaffirming the division of productive forces and not attempting to influence artistic content.

The following year, in contrast, and for the first time since the festival's establishment, the mayor chose to veto the artistic committee's decision to stage a play with politically

sensitive content. "There have already been cases of riots in Acre," he explained. "I know what such insensitivity can lead to in this city."<sup>11</sup> The mayor's decision was made in full agreement with his deputy, an Arab resident of Acre. Both believed that the play would lead to incitement and Jewish-Arab tensions in the city. The Tel Aviv artists, on the other hand, were aggravated by this intervention and interpreted it as censorship. In protest, the artistic director resigned, followed by members of the artistic committee and most of the competition shows. The flared tempers within the Tel Aviv theatre field led to calls to cancel the festival, and then to boycott it, along with a statement to the media that Acre's Fringe Festival would not be held that year: "All those who wish to censor theatre should know that doing so comes at a price."<sup>12</sup> This moment, when the artistic community united behind a threat to cancel the festival, was the moment at which it became the common enemy.

5. Unification in a struggle against a common enemy—In a media-covered struggle and via social networks, two groups engaged in battle. First, the mayor approached the director of the Acre Theatre Center, which had been operating in the city for some 35 years, and asked him to replace the artistic director who had resigned. The Center's director—a well-known fringe figure in the Israeli theatre field—accepted the position and spoke out in support of the city: "Theatre serves as a bridge between populations in Acre. People wait an entire year for the festival, and I regard it as my duty to safeguard its continuity this year as well."<sup>13</sup>

His attempts at reconciliation were met by insults and mudslinging on the part of the artists, intensifying the sense of struggle against a common enemy. The artists' on-line responses—featuring remarks such as "... he did something that should never be done," "filthy street dog," and "the Acre Theatre Center should be closed and artists should boycott it"<sup>14</sup>—were reflective of the belligerent mood. The local community and local artists, on the other hand, expressed their support, casting him as "... a courageous man who dares to think differently from the ruling junta."<sup>15</sup>

Realizing there would be no reconciliation, the local theatre field united, and the city recruited a new artistic committee consisting of theatre professionals who were willing to stand up to the Tel Aviv theatre field. The new committee took on the challenge of producing the festival in only three months and began the customary process of recruiting artists. This accelerated process concluded with the selection of eight new plays by artists who are not affiliated with the Tel Aviv artists' community and who agreed to participate in the festival despite the boycott. They included young artists, religious artists from Jerusalem and the Israeli-occupied West Bank, and artists from northern Israel.

The struggle continued during the months leading up to the festival. With regard to the city's selection of artistic content, the Tel Aviv artists leveled accusations of "religionization" and characterized the content as "low quality," "unprofessional," and "amateur." The city and the new artistic committee, on the other hand, praised the diversity of the artistic content:

"This year, plays, audiences, and a previously excluded population has entered.... This year, we will see all kinds of views, not only the left-wing view."<sup>16</sup>

This is a classical Bourdieusian discourse in which the gatekeepers of the national, central theatre field, which holds a monopoly on the specific capital tries to prevent the

new forces using the flag of "low quality," while the new peripheral actors possessing less capital, try to wiggle their way into the center by raising the flag of diversity and change.

The new-born solidarity within the local theatre field led to collaboration and responsibility for all four productive forces: the selection and production of artistic content, in addition to budgetary management and logistical support that had been under their purview since 2000.

6. **Combination** of local cultural capital leads to urban action—Cooperation within the Acre theatre field is what ultimately made the 2017 festival possible. This unification of local forces constituted a combination of local unions confronting a combination of capital, as reflected in Figure 4(d). The fact that the city's theatre institutions took charge of all productive forces, particularly the addition of artistic content selection and the creative process, enabled the city to change the array of forces between it and the artists and to position itself as host and proprietor.

An atmosphere of joint artistic work, solidarity, and mutual appreciation furthered the festival's production process, which was a feeling shared by the local production team and the new artistic committee. As reflected in the words of an Acre native who has participated in the production for the past five years: "This year, the vibe between us and the artists was much cooler. They were grateful for the stage they were given, they knew their place as guests and were excited by the opportunity to perform here ...<sup>\*17</sup> A member of the new artistic committee shared a similar vibe. As an established Arab actor from the Theatre Center he was selected to guide artists from a Jewish settlement in the Israeli-occupied West Bank. He emphasized that despite being two parties from different sides of the Jewish-Palestinian divide, the working process was an empowering experience during which "our love and our souls connected."<sup>18</sup>

The festival's final event represented the change and the newfound sense of city solidarity. In past years, this event involved an artistic prize-awarding "cultured" ceremony intended for the Tel Aviv theatre field. This year, however, the event was officiated by two clowns from the street events who, to cheers from the crowd, called to the stage representatives from the local theatre field who took part in the production of the festival. In his concluding speech, the mayor bolstered the narrative of unity against a common enemy and the city as a generous proprietor and host:

The city of Acre has always respected its people and its artists. We welcome everyone with an immense sense of love. Even when there are disagreements, we are able to put them aside and run the best festival we can...And this year, other populations came to Acre... This year, the festival proved, beyond anything else, that ultimately, Acre has won.

The narrative advanced by the Tel Aviv artists, who continued their boycott, painted the opposite picture, "Politics and rain defeated the theatre .... attendance was meagre and many visitors appeared to be attending primarily to support the ideology of the event, which is now perceived as religious and right wing."<sup>19</sup>

# DISCUSSION: A CITY FOR ITSELF OR A RACIST CENSORING CITY?

In this article, we showed how over the four decades of the festival in Acre, the city evolved from a *city in itself* to a *city for itself*; from a peripheral city, with two disadvantaged

communities struggling with one another over resources and cultural capital, into a city that, in the circumstances that emerged during the specific year in question, was able to overcome internal conflict and join forces to produce urban action. In conclusion, we seek to highlight art's role in this process: In the encounter, art was imported into the city as a cultural resource by external forces, and its content-elitist Fringe Theatre-served as a tool for imposing the hegemonic group values through a program of "high art." In the Israeli context, this was a way of "educating" disadvantaged peripheral communities in the modern-Western culture espoused by the state, to which the "Mizrachi" Jewish and Arab culture of the city's communities were considered to be inferior. During the first two decades of the festival, the city developed awareness to the exploitive conditions of the project. As a result, it demanded and assumed control over the budget but limited itself to this realm out of a sense of inferiority and inability to produce the "high" art that would draw elite groups and brand the city. At the same time, communication evolved between the local institutions, and a local theatre field took form. Art's role in the process changed significantly in 2017, when the proposed artistic content triggered an open confrontation. For the first time, the city insisted on its right to influence the artistic content within its borders. The city's argument, that the artistic content causes tensions between its two primary communities, resulted in unification in a struggle against a common enemy. At this stage, the city felt strong enough, with its well-established theatre field, to shake off the feelings of inferiority stemming from the label of "low culture" and to advance the art which it produces as worthy of serving as the content of the festival. The combination of local theatre institutions enabled control over its four productive forces: the budget and the logistical apparatus, for which it has been responsible for the past two decades, and in addition, and above all else, responsibility for the artistic content. The moment of emancipation was the moment at which the city stood behind its own artistic choices, when it believed that its theatre field was "worthy" enough, and that the culture it produced was not "low culture," but rather, the culture that suits it. In other words, the moment at which the local theatre field became an agent in the national theatre field, not accepting its peripheral "low" location within it. For the first time in the history of the festival, the city assumed control of the artistic medium and, through it, created itself as the proprietor. In parallel to the narrative presented above, the Tel Aviv theatre field advanced another narrative that is no less important-a narrative associated with the Israeli left wing, which fights nationalist extremism, censorship, and religionization in Israel. The boycott it implemented was rooted in a broader cultural struggle on the national level against Israel's right-wing government, which supported what they perceived as a nationalist censoring city. Their narrative raises a significant question that cannot be ignored: Is the urban coalition that was formed yet another reproduction of the national array of forces in which the hegemonic Jewish group subjects the city's weak Arab community to its own wishes?

Contrary to this reading, and without detracting from its value, we chose to highlight the city's emancipation from suppressive forces. Instead of focusing on the array of suppressive forces in the city and the manner in which they duplicate existing colonial patterns of social power relations, and as is customary in neo-Marxist reading of cities, we offered a newway of transposing Marx to the city and focused on identifying the moment of change within this array of forces. We emphasize art's power as cultural capital that was first imposed by the central dominant city and its theatre field as an educational tool, but that over the years was acquired by the city as a medium that enabled it to change its

status vis-à-vis the central city and, by building its own theatre field, to build its self-value. Nevertheless, was it truly a change, or merely an episode in the city's history? Following decades of external artistic control, we must be cautious with this conclusion and emphasize that one or even two years of local control are not sufficient to postulate sweeping change. Further research in the coming years is needed before we can clearly point to true emancipation. At this point in time, the act of conducting the festival as a "city for itself" can be understood as first steps towards artistic independence and control over the cultural capital. Thus, even if the city returns to its passive role in years to come, we argue that this moment of upheaval is a significant moment in the city's history. Was this process a case of religionization or legitimization of a right-wing, censoring city that was giving expression to its nationalist radicalization? Or was it a window for true change in the status of a peripheral city that chose, for the first time, to take control of its cultural capital and use it to become a *city for itself*? At this stage, these questions remain unanswered, providing a platform for subsequent research.

#### Notes

<sup>1</sup>A term used to describe cities in which Palestinian-Arab and Israeli-Jewish communities share the same urban jurisdiction. For further elaboration see Rabinowitz and Monterescu (2007) or Yacobi (2009).

<sup>2</sup>In a two-part Interventions piece in IJURR titled "Bourdieu Comes to Town," Wacquant, influenced by Savage (2011), gathers and analyzes a significant body of urban research produced by a new generation of scholars who employ Bourdieu's conceptualization in urban contexts (Wacquant 2018).

<sup>3</sup>For a review of center-periphery relations in the Israeli context, see also Shtern (2018).

<sup>4</sup>Interview with an Arab artist who grew up in the Old City of Acre (February 1, 2017).

<sup>5</sup>Interview with the Auditorium manager (December 7, 2014).

<sup>6</sup>Interview with a manager of the Theatre Centre (March 1, 2015).

<sup>7</sup>Interview with an Arab from the Old City (September 21, 2015).

<sup>8</sup>See remarks of the Auditorium's manager in Shem-Tov's interview (December 9, 2007).

<sup>9</sup>Interview with the Auditorium manager (December 7, 2014).

<sup>10</sup>https://www.haaretz.co.il/gallery/theater/accofestival/1.3088988

<sup>11</sup>Interview with Acre's Mayor (October 10, 2017).

<sup>12</sup>https://www.haaretz.co.il/gallery/theater/accofestival/1.4173199

<sup>13</sup>https://www.haaretz.co.il/gallery/theater/1.4174975

<sup>14</sup>See the online responses to footnote 13.

<sup>15</sup>Interview with Acre's artists (June 18, 2017).

<sup>16</sup>Interview with a member of the new artistic committee (October 8, 2017).

<sup>17</sup>Interview with a producer from Acre (October 10, 2017).

<sup>18</sup>Interview with a member of the new artistic committee (October 10, 2017).

<sup>19</sup>https://www.haaretz.co.il/gallery/.premium-1.449946

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