

Mixed Cities: Toward a counter urban space?

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“Mixed cities” is a widely used term in Israel, describing an urban situation in which Jewish and Arab communities occupy the same urban jurisdiction. However, a critical examination questions this terminology that brings to mind integration and mutual membership of society, while reality is controversial (Yacobi, 2009). Similar to other cases of settler societies, a clear spatial and mental division exists between Arabs and Jews in Israel, and hence the occurrence of mixed spaces is both exceptional and involuntary. Rather, it has resulted from a historical process during which Israeli territory, including previously Palestinian cities, were profoundly Judaized.

Lydda is located at the edge of the coastal plain of Palestine, and developed around a junction of routes leading from west to east (Jaffa-Jerusalem) and from south to north (Egypt-Syria-Lebanon). In 1922 the British Mandate Department of Statistics reported 8,103 inhabitants, including 7,166 Muslims, 926 Christians and 11 Jews. As with other Palestinian cities and villages, 1948 was a turning point in the history of Lydda. The Israeli army occupied the city, which was to be part of an Arab state according to the 1947 United Nations partition plan. In Operation Dani, 250 Palestinians were killed, and about 20,000 inhabitants escaped or were forced to leave the city. However, the need for specific labor was the main reason for allowing 1,030 Palestinians to remain in the city (IDF Archives 1860/50-31, October, 1948).

The Israeli policy toward the Palestinians in the newly-established state included transferring hundreds of workers from Galilee to work in the abandoned vineyards in and around Lod/al-Lydd. These workers lived Arab enclaves and were not allowed to remain in the city at the end of the agricultural season (Ben-Gurion Archives 9837-7/8/48, undated; IDF Archives 1850/50-31, October-November, 1948). Archival documents



show that security forces had total control over Palestinians' conduct, including their movements and their right to work (IDF Archives 1860/50-31, undated; IDF Archives 1860/50-32, undated). It is important to note that in order to gain such rights, proper political behavior of the Palestinian individual towards the Israeli governing body was necessary. This approach was supported by public discourse that constructed a negative image of the remaining Palestinians. Nonetheless, the remaining Palestinians in al-Lydd became powerless; their urban culture as well as their collective identity and leadership was undermined and, as reported by Israeli authorities at the time, Palestinians were a fragmented society that could not endanger Jewish hegemony (IDF Archives 1860/50-31, October, 1948).

In April 1949, the military government in Lod/al-Lydd ended (IDF Archives 1860/50-31, June, 1949), but there was still wide agreement concerning the necessity of controlling the Palestinian population. In the first period after the war, Palestinian refugees tried to penetrate and resettle in their houses in al-Lydd. The authority's reaction included military acts against them as well as a massive settlement of Jewish immigrants, mainly Mizrahim, or Oriental Jews (IDF Archives 1860/50-31, January 1949; IDF Archives 1860/50-31, December, 1948).

However, despite the intensive Judaization process that aimed to control the numerical balance between Jews and Palestinians, an ongoing process of internal Palestinian migration and natural growth challenged the ethno-national balance that the state tried to preserve. In addition to the informal construction for housing and urban services, the protests against house demolition constitute an alternative to the state's planning policy.

Data drawn from census figures show that the Palestinian population increased from 9 percent in 1950 to over 20 percent in 2000, while the Jewish population decreased from 91 percent to less than 80 percent. In order to understand these demographic changes, it is important to follow the historical events that have challenged the seemingly-hermetic process of Judaization.

In addition to the Palestinians who remained in al-Lydd after 1948, waves of Palestinian internally displaced refugees settled in the city since the 1950s, recomposing the city's



social profile and presenting more complex demographic strata. One of the dominant groups included internal refugees who were resettled in Lod/al-Lydd as part of an agreement with the Israeli authorities. During the 1960s, as part of the official Israeli policy, Bedouin families were settled in the northern part of Lod/al-Lydd, in the railway district, and integrated into the Jewish economy as cheap labor. The location of Lod/al-Lydd, close to the Tel Aviv metropolis, also attracted other groups of Palestinians. Some of them illegally occupied vacant and partly demolished houses in the city. Another group of Palestinians that were resettled by the authorities were considered the “collaborators¹”—Palestinians from the Gaza Strip and the West Bank, territories occupied by Israel in 1967.

This demographic flow embodies political, cultural, and economic tensions that are spatially expressed. The city presents a segregated pattern in which Palestinians dominate two areas in al-Lydd—the western and northern parts. These districts are characterized by what has been defined by the authorities as massive “illegal” construction and around 50 percent of the Palestinian population in the city lived in “illegal” structures. Palestinians’ perception towards their informal construction activity contrasts with Israeli state policy, as Palestinians see it as a struggle in order to achieve their housing rights. As described by a Palestinian interviewee:

I am trapped within two circles of discrimination. The first is the national circle that relates to me as a ‘problem.’ The second is the municipal circle, and here the situation is worse since it affects my daily life—discrimination on this level is total and deep. My basic rights are abused, my right for housing, my right to have proper schooling for the children. These services are supplied on the municipal level, and we are struggling to achieve them (A.M., personal communication, November 4, 2000).

The demographic control over the city is the rationale for the last wave of Judaization in Lod/al-Lydd that started in late 1990s, namely the arrival of immigrants from the former

¹ This group has collaborated with the Israeli security authorities, and is therefore perceived as traitors by other Palestinians. The authorities had to move these families from their original villages and cities, where their lives were endangered, and compensated them with housing in the city.



Soviet Union that currently compose 25 percent of the city's population (Yacobi, 2009). In a Municipality Report the demographic dynamics in the city are presented as a crucial issue, calling to "protect" the city from losing its Jewish dominance (2000).

The "mixed" urban context in Israel presents a "double cycle" of discrimination for Palestinian citizens in a state that defines itself as a Jewish and thus allocates resources according to ethnic hierarchy. Palestinians are further discriminated against in a city that declares itself as "mixed" but excludes the planning needs and identity of its Arab inhabitants. This logic determines the city's planning policy, the flow of capital, and the cultural production and modes of demographic engineering.

Yet, the urban landscape in Lod/al-Lydd has been shaped through the years not solely by "top-down" planning policies but also by "bottom-up" initiatives of massive "informal" construction of housing and services by the Palestinian community in the city. This spatio-political tension is at the core of the articulation of meaning and of a sense of belonging and identity within the Palestinian population.

"Bottom-up" initiatives of local communities, such as the informal organization in planning and infrastructure and the protest against house demolition, or the ongoing internal migration of Palestinians from Jaffa (following the rise of housing prices), re-shapes the city's form, function, and meaning, opening the possibility for the production of a counter urban space. Through the historical evolution and changing demographics of Lod/al-Lydd, a "mixed city" can be understood as one that underwent an intense period of Judaization, thus creating spatial separation and a place of discrimination against Palestinians.

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