

## **From Urban Cosmopolitanism to “Mixed Cities” to Ethnic Purity**

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Decades of Labor Zionist hegemony and appropriation of elements of its discourse by the post-1967 settlement movement have obscured the fact that the majority of Zionist settlers have always been urban. The trajectory of the Zionist settlement project shifted from urban coexistence and rural violence in the late Ottoman era toward increasing urban violence as the frontier shifted from the countryside to the cities, especially during the Nakba, and even more so after 1967.

Around 1880, some 30,000 non-Zionist Jews—one-third of them Ottoman citizens—lived in Palestine, primarily in Jerusalem, and in smaller numbers in Safed, Tiberias, Haifa, and Jaffa. Many of them were integrated into the fabric of urban life, spoke Arabic, and maintained economic and social relations with their Arab neighbors. The Sephardic business and cultural elite participated in the civic project launched by the 1908 Constitutional Revolution. These relationships posed an obstacle to the realization of the Zionist project. Consequently, efforts were made to “Zionize” these communities.

### **Urban Coexistence/Urban Conflict**

Conventional wisdom holds that the massacres of mainly Orthodox, non-Zionist Jews in Jerusalem, Hebron, and Safed during the 1929 “Buraq Uprising” proved the impossibility of Arab-Jewish urban coexistence. No’it and Dan Geva’s film, *Dvarim She-ra’iti Be-hevron*, (Things I Saw in Hebron) documents a dissident narrative. Jews recalled pre-1929 Hebron as:



A kind of paradise surrounded by vineyards, where Sephardic Jews and Arabs lived in idyllic coexistence. The long-time Ashkenazi residents were also treated well by the Arabs. The only ones who really aroused the Arabs' anger were the...students of the Lubavitcher Rebbe who came to redeem lands in the Holy Land and established a community in Hebron (Livneh, 2000).

Moreover, the great majority of Hebron's 600-800 Jews survived the uprising. Tom Segev reports that 435 were sheltered in the homes of 28 Arab families. One of those rescued recalled, "Arabs were hurt defending their neighbors." Dr. 'Abd al-'Al, an Egyptian, received a letter of thanks for the medical treatment he provided to Jews in addition to protecting a family in his own home (Segev, 2000, pp. 325-326).

The late 19th century population of Haifa was about 6,000, including nearly 1,000 Jews. Arabs and Jews migrated to Haifa as it became the main port and industrial center of Mandate Palestine. They worked together in the railway workshops, the port, Consolidated Refineries Limited, and other smaller enterprises.

David Ben-Gurion and his faction of the Histadrut leadership opposed joint Arab-Jewish unions, even in mixed workplaces. Nonetheless, by 1924 hundreds of Arab railway workers had joined the Histadrut-affiliated Union of Railway, Postal, and Telegraph Workers (URPTW). The union leadership campaigned to change the structure of the Histadrut to allow Arabs to join its affiliated unions. But by the end of 1925 most of the Arabs left the URPTW because the Histadrut demanded that only Jews should be hired in vacant positions. Insistence on "Jewish labor" undermined the solidarity of Arab and Jewish workers. Still, in 1944-45 the URPTW and the Palestine Arab Workers Society conducted joint strikes and a three-day occupation of the railway workshops. These actions were hailed by the Palestinian National Liberation League as proof that Arab and Jewish workers could cooperate if racism and nationalist fanaticism were set aside (Lockman, 1993).



In 1561, the Ottoman Sultan Sulayman the Magnificent granted Joseph Nasi the tax-farming concession for Tiberias and Safed and encouraged him to settle Jewish refugees from Spain there. Safed became both a center for study of the kabbalah and of wool textile manufacturing. Many Sepharadim became integrated with their Arab surroundings, as they had been in Spain. Nearly the entire Jewish population left Safed after the 1759 earthquake. By the late 19th century the Jewish population rose to 3,700, about 40 percent of the total. But Safed was no longer a manufacturing or commercial center and both the Muslim and Jewish communities were conservative and insular. Hence, there were fewer opportunities for Arab-Jewish cooperation than in Haifa, Jaffa, or Jerusalem, and relations were apparently not good.

The local imam incited Muslims to attack Jews during the 1929 uprising, and 18 were murdered. In 1940 a controversy erupted over a playground in a Jewish schoolyard funded by Bertha Guggenheimer. She was a prominent member of the Hadassah Women's Zionist Organization of America and close to its president Erma Lindheimer, who supported a binational Palestine. Arab children began coming to the playground, and Jewish parents and the leader of the Jewish community, Rabbi Podhoretz, insisted that they be banned. Representatives of the Guggenheimer Foundation protested in vain that this violated the terms of Guggenheimer's bequest (Segev, 2000, pp. 390-391). This might be seen as the precursor of the 2010 letter of Chief Rabbi Shmuel Eliyahu and 17 other rabbis urging Jews not to rent apartments to Arabs in Safed.

### **Urban Ethnic Cleaning**

The destruction of Palestinian urban life was an important aspect of the Nakba. About one-third of the 1948 refugees were urbanites. Among them were: 35,000-45,000 mostly middle-class and elite inhabitants of West Jerusalem who fled or were driven out from January through April; some 150,000 expelled from Jaffa,



Haifa, Acre, Tiberias, Beisan, and Safed during the Haganah's implementation of Plan Dalet April through May; and 40,000-50,000 expelled from Lydda and Ramle during Operation Dani in July. The diaries of Yosef Nachmani, explicated by Benny Morris and graphically presented in Dalia Karpel's film, document the first and paradigmatic example of the willful destruction of Arab-Jewish urban life in Tiberias (Karpel, 2005; Morris, 1990, pp. 159-211). Despite his shady dealings in "redeeming the land" of the Galilee, Yosef Nachmani, a Jewish National Fund purchasing agent, was fluent in Arabic, had good relations with many of the city's Arab notables, and served on the city council. In early April 1948 the leadership of the 6,000 Arab residents, almost half the population, refused to allow the Arab Liberation Army into the city. Nonetheless, on 10 April the Haganah attacked and rejected Nachmani's offer to facilitate a truce. Subsequently, all the Arabs fled. Nachmani then traveled to Tel Aviv to meet with Ben-Gurion, who instructed him in the Haganah's war objectives. Returning home, Nachmani proposed that every Arab home in Tiberias be razed. His son Shimon, a Haganah sapper, executed the task.

In the late 1940s, Jaffa was the largest Arab urban concentration in Palestine (about 70,000). Among its 30,000 Jewish residents were descendants of the 2,000 Ottoman citizen Jews who lived there in 1880. Eyal Sivan's film, *Jaffa: The Orange's Clockwork*, documents Arab and Jewish collaboration in the citrus export industry through the 1940s (Osnat & Sivan, 2009). Zionist settlement and military conquest transformed Jaffa from a cosmopolitan Ottoman city into a poor neighbor of Jewish Tel-Aviv.

On 25 April 1948, as the British prepared to leave Palestine, the ETZEL (Irgun) began a three-day assault on Jaffa, indiscriminately firing 20 tons of mortar shells into the city. A simultaneous Haganah attack on the neighboring villages cut off all escape routes except the sea. When Jaffa surrendered on 14 May, only approximately 4,000 Arabs remained. Ben-Gurion visited Jaffa on 18 May and brazenly wrote in his diary, as though he had no idea what the Zionist military



forces were doing, “I couldn't understand: Why did the inhabitants of Jaffa leave?” (Morris, 2004, p. 219).

In Tiberias as well as Safed and Beisan, ethnic cleansing was total. Israel's “mixed cities” are the result of incomplete ethnic cleansing and the settlement of largely Mizrahi immigrants in Jaffa, Acre, Lydda, and Ramle. In Jerusalem and Haifa, elegant Arab homes were typically occupied by Ashkenazim.

Urban Zionist colonization intensified after 1967. The urban settlements in and around Jerusalem, as well as Ariel, Betar 'Ilit, Ma'alei Adumim, Modi'in 'Ilit, and Kiryat Arba', house about 350,000 of the roughly 550,000 settlers. Following the model established by Tel-Aviv in 1909, they are purely Jewish.

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