

## **Acre and Haifa: Sisters on two sides of a single bay**

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The distance between the two sister cities Acre and Haifa barely exceeds twenty kilometers by land, and five kilometers by sea. Yet, just as history links them, it also distances them. While Acre has a historical heritage stretching back over 2,000 years, in its current incarnation, Haifa is relatively new, dating back just 250 years (Moammar, 1979).

Since its birth, Acre—as a central city in northern Palestine—has played a number of economic, social, political, religious, and cultural roles. In the realm of culture, for instance, the city’s Ahmadiyya School, located adjacent to the Al-Jazzar Mosque, provided religious and other forms of education to students from the surrounding region and beyond. From its founding until the Nakba in 1948, the Ahmadiyya School counted imams, sheikhs, religious scholars, and teachers among its graduates. Other schools were founded in the city, whose role in the field of education has been recognized, including the Terra Sancta School, an establishment that continues to function to this day. During the Ottoman and British Mandate eras, a number of Acre’s residents were engaged in political action; one of them, Mufti As’ad Shuqayri, represented Acre and the surrounding region in the Ottoman Council of Envoys in Istanbul. His son, Ahmad Shuqayri, was one of the founders of the Palestinian Liberation Organization and became a leading national figure. The city provided the setting for various political activities directed against the pro-Zionist British Mandate, including conferences and seminars. Acre is also the final resting place of the three martyrs Hijazi, al-Zeer, and Jamjoom, who were executed by British Mandate authorities in 1930 for participating in the Buraq Uprising.



Acre was filled with the businesses and workshops of artisans who gained renown for their fine pottery, copper and textile work. Acre is likewise famed for its expert fishermen, whose forefathers passed on their profession from generation to generation for thousands of years, making their livelihood from the sea. Today, however, they face harassment from Acre Municipality officials seeking to sever their connection to the sea. In April and May 1948, Acre absorbed thousands of refugees from Haifa who arrived aboard liners and crawlers from the Port of Haifa, fleeing the fire of the Haganah military organization, which executed the plan to expel the Arab population of Haifa. Some of the refugees remained in Acre, while others moved on to Lebanon as the city's fall to the Haganah grew imminent.

Today, Acre faces many problems, most notably in housing. Restrictions are placed on Arab residents in order to drive them out of the city; however, they hold steadfast to their homes and their rights to remain and live in dignity. One such restriction is the ban on Acre residents carrying out repairs to their homes under various pretexts, such as the buildings being too old. In addition, no development projects are implemented in the city's Arab neighborhoods, which are mainly located within the walls of the Old City, and Jewish investors are urged to purchase houses owned by 'absentee' Arab residents of Acre.

Haifa, Acre's younger sister to the south, has a shorter history. Though it is the most recent Palestinian city, it has nonetheless witnessed very significant changes in the lives of Palestinians and Arabs from neighboring countries. As the star of Acre began to fade, Haifa emerged as a modern, open city that was ready for all manner of transformations.

German settlement played a major part in elevating Haifa to a new stage of modernity. Additionally, the arrival of the Hejaz railway line from the Levant connected the Syrian interior to the coast, thereby providing thousands of workers with a livelihood. Meanwhile, the development of the port stimulated commercial development and the growth of Arab and foreign investment.

The establishment of the industrial zone during the British Mandate era played a large part in attracting tens of thousands of workers to Haifa. At the same time, the



various segments of the Arab population that arrived from Palestinian towns and villages—and even from Syria in the broader geographical sense—began to lay the foundations of Haifa’s social, cultural, political, economic, and educational life. The villagers who arrived to Haifa founded various associations to manage their affairs. Schools affiliated with ecclesiastical institutions and private associations also opened and played an important role in raising students’ educational level, to keep pace with the great evolutionary leap forward that the city was experiencing. New cultural, literary, and sports clubs provided a wide range of activities, catering to their tastes and needs.

Of the 30-plus Arab newspapers that were established in Haifa, the eminent publication was *Carmel*, founded by Najib Nassar. The newspaper alerted Arabs to the dangers of Zionism, particularly the issue of land sales. In addition, the city’s theaters hosted theatre and music groups from Egypt and Lebanon, notably the Ramses troupe, directed by Yousef Wehbe. The Carmel Theater in Haifa put on shows that drew thousands of people from both inside and outside the city. Political action in the city took place through the establishment of political parties and opening of branch offices for parties based outside Haifa. These parties helped raise political awareness about confronting the expanding Zionist project. As a city of workers, Haifa was also home to the newly-founded Association of Arab Workers, a labor movement organized in an attempt to offset the dominance of the Zionist *Histadrut* union. The Scout Movement also played a role in educating the youth and raising their level of consciousness.

In the face of the urban development of Arab Haifa, the Zionist project was active in establishing settlements on the peaks of Mount Carmel overlooking the city. Zionist institutions successfully extended their hegemony over the city’s institutions, most notably the municipality, which fell under its control in 1940. Zionist institutions were also able to dominate the city’s industrial and banking sectors with the support of the Mandatory Government. During the Mandate, the number of Jews in the city increased several-fold, as the following table indicates.



Year	Total Population	Arabs	Jews
1914	22,000	18,500	3,500
1922	24,634	18,404	6,230
1931	50,403	34,480	15,923
1944	128,000	62,000	66,000
1948 (pre-Nakba)	155,000	75,000	80,000
1948	85,500	3,500	82,000

**Table reprinted from Ben-Artzi (1989, p. 31).**

Thus, Haifa was divided into two communities that existed in two separate sections of the city: the Palestinian community spread naturally along the coast and over the low-lying slopes of Mount Carmel situated off the port and the sea, alongside a Jewish community that lived in settler neighborhoods on the top of the Carmel. The latter's location ensured its potential for future military superiority, allowing for Arab Haifa to be attacked and destroyed during the Nakba.

Arabs from Haifa and elsewhere succeeded in building a modernist, liberal society that was completely open to other communities through the lifestyles it offered and the wide-ranging services it provided to people from all walks of life. This developing community was exposed to various influences that acted on the city. Nonetheless, Palestinian society in Haifa managed to maintain its Arab identity.

On the eve of the Nakba, the population of Haifa exceeded 70,000. According to a census conducted by the Haifa Municipality on May 31, 1948, only 3,500 Arabs remained after the Nakba (Haifa Municipality Archive, 1948). The Haganah and other Zionist military organizations waged a campaign of ethnic cleansing in the city, firing explosive barrels and shells at Arab residential neighborhoods and business centers. The attacks sowed fear and panic among Arab citizens, impelling many to flee. Moreover, the Mandate leadership in Haifa paved the way for the Zionist organizations to seize strategic locations in the city, and handed them a

number of military headquarters and bases. Thus, Zionist military superiority in Haifa was clear.

The assault by the Jewish community and its military organizations on Haifa interrupted the city's march towards urbanization. The Israeli authorities began to demolish entire neighborhoods and resettle Jewish immigrants in other neighborhoods, such as Wadi al-Salib, sometimes in Palestinians' homes. The Haifa Municipality altered the names of Arab streets and neighborhoods as a further step towards the city's Judaization. According to estimates, only 20 percent of the original Arabic place names in Haifa remain (Mansour, 1999, p. 25). Thus, Haifa's Arab features were erased following the cleansing of the city's indigenous population.

After 1948, the Haifa Municipality and other Israeli institutions sought to Judaize the city based on the ambitions and visions of Zionism (in terms of institutions and modes of political conduct), and Europeans (in terms of architecture, public spaces, and cultural life), in an attempt to create a Jewish city totally disconnected from its Palestinian past. Haifa today meets the needs and aspirations of its Ashkenazi Jewish settlers (Jews from Europe), while the Arabs who remained (numbering around 3,500 immediately after the Nakba, from a pre-Nakba population of 80,000; Mansour, 1999, p. 27; Haifa Municipality Archive, 1948), and those who joined them from the villages of the Galilee and the Northern Triangle in search of a living and an education, continue to seek a sense of belonging to what remains of their Arab city. Haifa today is alienated from its Arab form and foundations; it has begun to lose its Arab identity in both form and substance. It is as if the Arabs are faced with another Haifa, different from that which was founded by the indigenous population according to their own visions and aspirations.



Similarly, the Acre Municipality is endeavoring to empty the Old City of its Arab population by continuing to prohibit Arabs from carrying out maintenance and construction work, on the pretext that it is a historical and archaeological site. The municipality is also badly neglecting social services, which has a negative impact on various aspects of life, leading, inter alia, to rampant drug abuse and criminal delinquency. Instead, the municipality has focused its energies on building new neighborhoods outside the city walls to absorb new Jewish immigrant settlers. Thus, two cities have emerged: the old, historical, ramshackle Acre, and the new, developed Acre. The same applies to Haifa, where the Arab neighborhoods have been systematically neglected, and where, by contrast, there has been major investment in the Jewish neighborhoods.

In both cities, Haifa and Acre, there are two separate communities, Arab and Jewish, that exist separately from one another—nationally, socially, educationally, and service-wise—with very few links between them. This divide is a result of the Israeli government's national and local planning policies, implemented in accordance with the project of Judaization and increasing racial segregation.



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