

[Mixed] Cities

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For the Alternative Lexicon for Palestine-Israel

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In reference to David Harvey's seminal work (1989), in this essay I would like to frame Palestine-Israel as an urban question, while looking at the process of urbanization through the dynamics of power relations. I would suggest that looking at Palestine-Israel as an urban question is important since the Palestine-Israel "conflict" is (too) often framed through macro-geopolitics, religious, or historical lenses, overlooking the everyday micro-spaces created within the colonial power relationships such as cities. In other words, one should understand the role of both physical and symbolic division and "mixing" of urban space in Palestine-Israel since as rightly suggested by Diane Davis (2011: 228), when urban conflicts were studied "it is almost always with the presupposition that identity conflicts are fuelled by, and most evident in, physical separation - that it is in the form of divided cities".

Urbanization in Palestine-Israel is deeply politicized, polarized along different attributes such as infrastructure, housing, land and distribution of urban goods, while despite of being contested, cities provide spaces of encounter between Israelis and Palestinians. While these are operating within unequal power relations, these might be the potential spaces for change, reconciliation and decolonization. Indeed, cities are inherently sites of conflict over resources, identity, power and domination and the question that we need to focus on is how and why *agonism* - namely the ability of urban systems to articulate and include diversity - is transformed into antagonism, violence and exclusion. Wendy Pullan (2015) investigates the role of agonism in shaping urban life while discussing urban conflicts in highly contested cities such as Beirut, Jerusalem, Nicosia, Belfast and Sarajevo. However, she further (provocatively) suggests that conflicts and contestations should be understood as urban phenomenon ("agonistic practices"), accentuating their constructive aspects in everyday life.

Specifically, I focus on what is defined as "mixed cities", a linguistic term that describes situations in which Jewish and Arab communities occupy the same urban jurisdiction and might suggests the integration of society, while instead the reality is controversial. The common use of the term "mixed city," raises images of diversity and mutual membership while ignoring questions of power and resistance. This critique is directed at the central question: is it possible to acknowledge the diversity in cities within a planning and civil system operating under the settler-colonial rationale? Referring to James Holston, it is possible, at least in the political realm: in his attempts to propose feasible political options for the right to the city, Holston points to how the city is a space in which residents consciously oppose and undermine dominant narratives of the state. In parallel, communities in the city create alternative local narratives that do not necessarily reflect the rationale of the nation, nor the social hierarchy or the power relations that create them.

State systems tend, indeed, to be more abstract and remote from everyday life and in the case of Palestine-Israel such argument is important since as in other cases of settler-colonialism, a clear spatial and mental division exists between Arabs and Jews within Israel, and hence the occurrence of “mixed” spaces is both exceptional and involuntary. Rather it has resulted from a historical process during which the Palestine-Israel territory, including cities that were previously Palestinian, has been Judaized. For many Israeli Jews the idea of “mixed” spaces is considered as an ab-normal phenomenon that contradicts the settler-colonial logic of the purification of space. For others, the notion of mixed urban spaces might be understood as a space for potential normality.

Three main typologies of “mixed cities” can be identified. The first refers to cities such as Haifa where Jews and Arabs lived under the same municipality prior to the establishment of the state of Israel. The second includes cities such as Ramla, Acre, West Jerusalem, and Jaffa that were Palestinian prior to 1948, and that became dominated by a Jewish migrant after the establishment of the state. A third category refers to new “Judaizing towns” that were established post-1948 for the Jewish population such as Carmiel and Upper Nazareth as well as Jewish East Jerusalem and that have accommodated in the last few decades Palestinian internal migration.

Political philosophy discusses the notion of the city as a political entity and traces the very idea of democracy to the setting of an urban community, stretching back to ancient Athens, through medieval cities, and to the recent flourishing industrial cities of the west. The notion of the *polis*, as Hannah Arendt put it “... is not the city-state in its physical location; it is the organization of the people as it arises out of acting and speaking together, and its true space lies between people living together for this purpose, no matter where they happen to be” (Arendt 1958: 30-31). This line of argument illustrates the promise of the city and its potential to provide enabling space for the dissolution of hierarchical ethnic and class boundaries. The city is where ethnic communities tend to congregate and generate intellectual, political and economic elites, playing host to key symbolic and cultural resources. Hence, conflicts between ethnic groups and different classes regularly occur on urban territory, with major consequences to the shaping of nations and states.

A central issue that frames the production of “mixed cities” is settler-colonialism. Settler-colonial society is based on a project of settling newcomers on contested “frontiers” to achieve political control over those spaces, as well as access to key resources. It is premised on the colonial legacy in which Europeans immigrated to other territories, while often categorizing the new lands as *terra nullius*, to be seized and

used by the modern, advanced nations of the world. Settler-colonial societies may be “external” or “internal.” The former relates to the organized movement of people across borders, often into other continents, as in the period of European colonialism. The latter refers to the planned ethnicization of “internal frontiers,” in which the state manipulates the local geography to further the interests of a dominant ethnic group. In frontier urbanism, hence, civilian populations and urban structures are intentionally used to propagate conflict.

Different researchers have identified Israel with the social and spatial patterns that characterize the settler-colonial model. In such societies, several broad “ethno-class” categories tend to form over time – the “founders,” the “immigrants,” the “locals” and most recently, also the “foreigners”. The ethno-classes are created by the geographical process of expansion and settlement, and by the associated flows of resources and development, which are determined by, and hence reflect, the power relations between ethnic groups. This creates structural stratification, where ethnic origin and class affiliation largely overlap. In such settings, the founding (or “charter”) group gains dominant political, cultural, and economic status during the critical formative period of the new state. In Israel, this group is mainly composed of Ashkenazi Jews, the “founders” of Zionism and the state. The second group is comprised of various non-Ashkenazi “immigrants,” most notably the Mizrahi ethno-class and recently also Russian and Ethiopian Jews, who have joined the “founders” in their national project of settlement, albeit from an inferior economic and cultural position. The third group, Palestinian-Arabs, resided on the land for generations prior to the arrival of most settlers. They are largely excluded from the process of constructing the new nation and are generally “trapped” in their inferior ethno-class status.

With reference to the model of settler-colonial society, Oren Yiftachel (2006) developed the concept of “ethnocracy” as a distinct colonial-type regime established to enhance the expansion and control of a dominant ethno-national group in multi-ethnic territories. In such regimes, he suggests, ethnicity rather than citizenship forms the main criteria for distributing power and resources. As a result, such regimes typically display highly uneven levels of ethnic segregation as well as a process of polarizing ethnic politics. Ethnocratic regimes combine a degree of political openness and formal-democratic representation with political structures that facilitate the seizure of contested territory by a dominant ethno-nation. During this process, the dominant group appropriates the state apparatus and marginalizes peripheral ethnic and national minorities.

Mixed cities in Palestine-Israel often reflect the wider ethnocratic conflicts. Urban politics usually revolve around struggles for space, economic resources and political power, most commonly along the ethno-national lines. However, mixed cities never fully replicate the dynamics of the wider conflict, mainly because the urban arena is governed by a combination of powers, regulations, and forces that are different from the ones prevailing in non-urban regions. The planning and implementation of frontier settlement is considered one of the highest achievements of the state of Israel and, in some respects, the entire country became a frontier. Significantly, the idea of “the frontier” was also alive in Israel’s mixed cities, especially in the planning discourse, which commonly spoke about “the necessity” to build Jewish housing on, or immediately adjacent to, Arab urban neighborhoods (Yacobi 2009). In the plans of most mixed cities, specific goals appear around “keeping the Jewish character” and of combating the “danger” of increasing Arab population, which might create a “demographic threat” to the city.

This rationale received stark physical expression in mixed urban areas such as Akko, Haifa, Jaffa, Ramla, and Lod, where high-density Jewish neighborhoods were rapidly constructed around the small Arab enclaves that were left in what were previously Palestinian cities. The treatment of urban Arab neighborhoods as “internal frontiers” into which Jewish presence should expand, turned all mixed Arab-Jewish cities in Israel into “urban ethnocracies” (Yacobi, 2009). Arab presence was thus delegitimized, and constantly portrayed as a “danger,” causing deep patterns of planning discrimination.

While ethnocracy was a relevant framework for understanding the urban dynamics in mixed cities - this is no longer the case. During the past two decades the urban processes focus on demographic control, as well as an intensifying militarization and a growing use of state violence which transformed mixed cities (especially Jerusalem) from an *ethnocracies* into an urban apartheid. In our current market-driven, neo-liberal era, urban apartheid should be taken as a distinct regime based on urban trends such as privatization of space, gentrification, urban design, infrastructure development and touristic planning. These practices substitute for explicit apartheid legislation (of a sort introduced in the South African case), bringing to the fore new participants in the apartheidization of the city, such as real estate developers and various interest groups.

My argument stems from the fact that contested urbanism has been studied along two separated lines which are that often understood as contradicting each other and studied separately: one is the ethno-national contested city, and the other is the neoliberal city. In the former that dominates the discourse, the first generation of

literature on the “Jerusalem conflict”, for instance, focused on the city being “divided,” as a “top-down” subject of Israeli colonial aspirations. This literature analyzed the power of the state from the perspective of its legislative, planning and military mechanisms. Others offer a more nuanced understanding of urban processes, presenting Jerusalem as an arena of highly charged power relations, a contested space that is continuously produced and reproduced by “bottom-up” protest, global forces and a wide spectrum of political institutions (NGOs, religious organizations, professionals).

Some of the processes discussed in the literature can be seen as even more radicalized: over the last few years, groups of Jewish settlers have colonized new houses in mixed cities within Israel as well as in Jerusalem’s Palestinian neighborhoods such as Sheikh Jarrah and Silwan, Israeli military forces and Palestinian protestors alike were involved in escalating tension and clashes around mixed cities. But the logic behind the increased “security” measures fails to solve the conflict, facilitating, instead, the process of apartheidization.

The transition from ethnocratic regime into urban apartheid can be demonstrated by the way in which the Palestinian Ghetto (the product of urban ethnocratic policies) has been turned into a frontier. James Ron (2003) proposes that a frontier is a territory that is not integrated into the realm of influence of a state’s legal apparatus, thus enabling an exercise of “illegal” power. A Ghetto, on the other hand, despite being a space of exclusion, is still under the influence of the controlling state law. Ron considers 1992 Bosnia to be an example of a frontier, where violent actions included ethnic cleansing. He considers the Occupied Territories in the 1990s to have been a ghetto in relation to Israel and claims that despite the outbreak of the First Intifada in late 1987, the rough measures taken by Israel did not amount to expulsion or demographic engineering. I would suggest that this is no longer the case – for the Palestinian Ghetto in Jerusalem, and even on mixed cities within the Green Line, are undergoing a rapid frontierization, characterized by escalation in state violence, and the attempt to empty large Palestinian neighborhoods of their inhabitants and at solidifying the separation between Jewish and Palestinian populations.

In parallel to the top-down politics, a more nuanced understanding of the urban dynamics at play by looking at a set of inversions, such as Palestinians moving to dwell in neighbourhoods that were planned as Jewish colonies in Jerusalem (Shtern and Yacobi, 2018) or those moving to Jewish neighbourhoods in Lod or Upper Nazareth (Schwake and Yacobi, 2023). Palestinian residents of these neighbourhoods live there for banal – or “apolitical” – reasons, for instance, to improve their living standards. Yet at the same time their movement is part of the territorial struggle for

control and belonging. Palestinians who move from East Jerusalem to the city's Jewish settlement-neighbourhoods, such as French Hill and Pisgat Ze'ev (Pullan and Yacobi, 2017), are still urban denizens. The elements of the regime operating under the logic of the private market enable free movement, but they also coalesce with the juridical infrastructure that maintains the city's Palestinian population in a status quo of inherent inequality.

To a certain extent our discussion also draws from recent critical interventions in conceptualising the post-colonial moment and the meaning of decolonisation. Mixed cities are a messy project that operates on various scales that both contrast and intersect. To think of encounters in the apartheid city is to consider how the minute, everyday moments upon which the separation regime and the mechanisms of governance in the city are predicated can be ruptured and reaffirmed. What emancipatory powers can we identify in the apartheid city? It is a hard question. To what degree does the movement of Palestinians into Jewish districts truly enable mobility and rupture the settler colonial reality on the ground? At the very least, it emphasises the importance of evaluating the unintended consequences of the neo-liberal ideology that dominates the urban transformation of the city and the scalar dimensions with which we evaluate the shape and form of apartheid today.

Here stand the very characteristics of the mixed-apartheid city (rather than national or regional scales); There is a constant tension between the desires of the Israeli state to fully control space, and the ongoing, increased, presence of Palestinian inhabitants into everyday life within these territories. Such tension, stemming from the very nature of the urban (such as density, shared infrastructure, involuntary encounters in public space), is expressed in individuals' aspirations to improve housing conditions, secure employment, use urban services, or even to consume goods (Yacobi and Ram, 2023).

Cities, even in conflict areas, provide spaces of agonistic encounter between different communities. Across the world, several cities have emerged as examples of peacebuilding and reconciliation following periods of severe conflict, violence and division. In South Africa, Cape Town and Johannesburg played central roles in the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, which sought to address the injustices of apartheid through restorative justice. Kigali, Rwanda, became a site of national recovery after the 1994 genocide, employing community-based courts to promote accountability and unity. Belfast in Northern Ireland has advanced peace through inter-community dialogue and integrated education in the aftermath of sectarian violence. Medellín, Colombia, transformed its image from one of urban violence to social

inclusion through innovative planning and community engagement, while Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina, has promoted coexistence and intercultural understanding after the Bosnian War.

Indeed, this debate can be expanded upon in relation to the city of many cultures. In a city with a more diverse population with a greater range of difference, that is relatively weak economically and undermines politics of identity, difference and recognition, the challenge to the ethno-national rationale and the tendency to deviate from it will be greater (Holston, 1999). The urban level administration should respond to this challenge and display more sensitivity to the issue than state institutions. This sensitivity at the urban level is identified with diversity, meaning an urban policy that is not restricted to the theory of difference or managing difference, but sees difference an ideological value, worthy of recognition and preservation, as an alternative that undermines the suppressive rationale of capital and ethno-nationalism. Nancy Fraser (2003) emphasizes that this recognition cannot come in place of or be separated from distributive questions, and it should not draw attention away from distributive issues, as then the city would fall into the trap of keeping the hierarchy as dictated by the state's spatial ordering, and the potential for fulfilling the right to the city would be prevented. One of these conditions is the existence of an institutional order that will support the realization of multiculturalism that strives for the existence of social justice in distributional and recognition terms. Young suggests a framework of self-definition without dominance, appropriate to a spatial framework where different groups live together and apart.

This approach, based on institutional community frameworks of self-management, strives to manage issues that are of common interest to all the communities through mechanisms of dialogue that are non-hierarchical, without an institutional authority standing above the communities. Only certain issues, agreed upon by the communities, would be made the responsibility of a central institutional body such as the municipality. According to Young's approach, granting power to communities to manage their affairs, alongside ongoing contact with other communities in a non-dominant way, is a condition for the realization of recognition, which allows the realization of distributive aspirations which, as emphasized by Fraser, is important for the pursuit of social-spatial justice (Fraser, 2003).

Based on the above, can [mixed] cities in Palestine Israel play a pivotal role in transforming the political landscape into a shared future? As indicated throughout this paper the forceful effect of the banalisation of occupation in East Jerusalem and the West Bank, and even within the Green Line was orchestrated by Israeli law, planning and state regulations that privilege Jewish citizens (Pullan and Yacobi, 2017). But the questions to be asked are whether these processes are reversible? Can we imagine a future bi-national\shared cities by Israelis and

Palestinians, Jews and Arabs, based on equal terms administered by a decentralized, urban federal-type, democratic regime? Finally, why don't we start the process of opening our hearts towards reconciliation, or peace, in urban settings where everyday life of Israelis and Palestinians, despite of being rooted in colonial context, are intermingled?

A good political will on both sides is essential, enabling the decolonisation of space and governance, power sharing and reconciliation which will be based on the three principals: (i) The demarcation of a *shared metropolis (in the case of Jerusalem) or shared municipalities (within the green line)* under joint Israeli and Palestinian \ Jewish and Arab sovereignty, and the formation of institutions that will enable these urban territories to function; (ii) The creation of a decentralized *system of sub-municipalities or sun-districts* to manage the daily urban life in the neighborhoods which make up these urban territories; and (iii) The definition of a small area around shared heritage sites (such as the Old City in Jerusalem) to be managed by shared councils (to be also responsible on the holy sites within these cities) to be composed of both local and international religious representatives.

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